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FEBRUARY 2015 VOLUME 25 ISSUE 2

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



JOAQUIN TAKES A TRIP: PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON'S

INHERENT VICE

PLUS

● 'FOXCATCHER' ● 'A MOST VIOLENT YEAR' ● MIKE NICHOLS ● FREDERICK WISEMAN
● THE DOUBLE LIFE OF ERIC ROHMER ● 'WHIPLASH' ● 'AMERICAN SNIPER' ● CHANTAL AKERMAN

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after SHOAH



IN CINEMAS 9TH JANUARY 2015

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- Esquire

"A Historic Film"

- The New Yorker

"A Monumental Film"

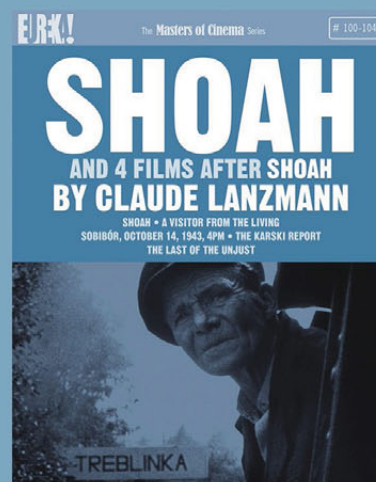
- Kent Jones, Film Comment

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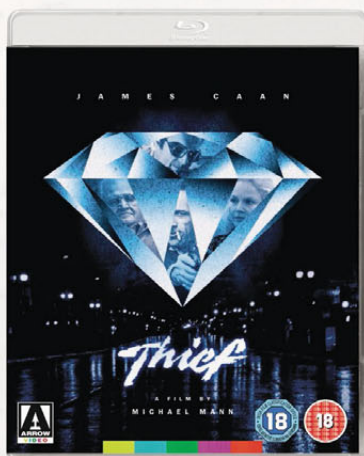
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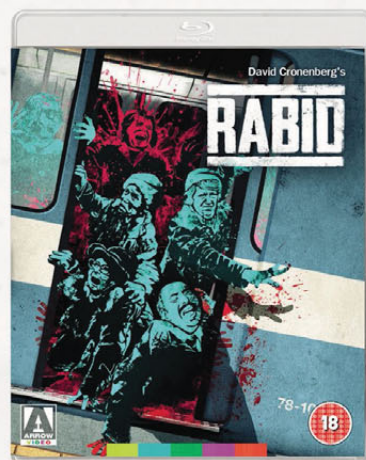
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Editorial enquiries

21 Stephen Street London W1T 1LN
t: 020 7255 1444
w: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound
e: S&S@bfi.org.uk

Social media

f: facebook.com/SightSoundmag
t: twitter.com/SightSoundmag

Subscriptions

t: 020 8955 7070
e: sightandsound@abacusemedia.com
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CONTRIBUTORS

Cristina Álvarez López is co-editor of the online film journal *cinetransit.com*

Geoff Andrew is senior film programmer at BFI Southbank

Alice Butler is a freelance writer and film programmer

Mark Cousins is a critic and filmmaker

Geeta Dayal is a music critic based in California and the author of *Another Green World*, a book on Brian Eno

Sam Davies is a freelance writer
Charles Gant is film editor at *Heat* magazine

Oliver Gaycken is an assistant professor in English and film at the University of Maryland

Pamela Hutchinson writes about film at *silentlondon.co.uk*

David Jenkins is editor of *Little White Lies*

Trevor Johnston writes on film for *Time Out*

Philip Kemp is a freelance writer and film historian

Adrian Martin is co-editor of the online film magazine *LOLA*

Hannah McGill is a freelance writer and critic

Kim Morgan is a critic and programmer and writes about film at *sunsetgun.typepad.com*

Kim Newman's latest novel is *An English Ghost Story*

Nick Pinkerton is a New York-based film critic and programmer

Lucy Porter is a writer and comedian

Vic Pratt is a curator at the BFI National Archive

Jonathan Romney is a freelance critic, writer and filmmaker

David Thomson's books include *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film* and *The Big Screen*

Catherine Wheatley is a lecturer in film studies at King's College, London

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on sale 10 February

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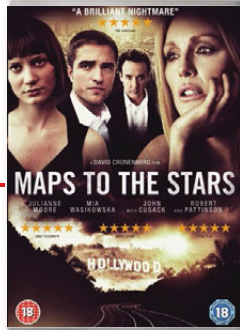


And online this month Lisa Cholodenko's *Olive Kitteridge* | Jill Soloway's online drama *Transparent* | sidekicks of the Marx brothers | elastic superheroes and more bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

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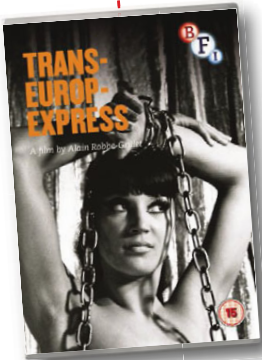
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also available on blu-ray
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hardware:
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also available on blu-ray
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trans-europ-express
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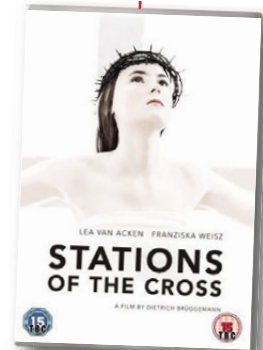
obvious child
released 19/01/15



the last seduction
released 26/01/15



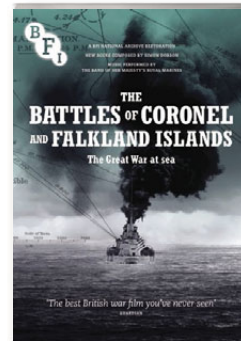
stations of the cross
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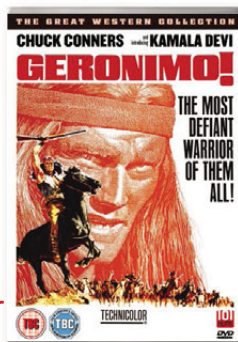


bad timing
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EDITORIAL

Editor

Nick James

Deputy editor

Kieron Corless

Features editor

James Bell

Web editor

Nick Bradshaw

Production editor

Isabel Stevens

Chief sub-editor

Jamie McLeish

Sub-editors

Robert Hanks

Jane Lamacraft

Ben Walters

Researchers

Mar Diestro-Dópidio

Credits supervisor

Patrick Fahy

Credits associates

Kevin Lyons

Pieter Sonke

James Piers Taylor

Design and art direction

chrisbrowndesign.com

Origination

Altimage

Printer

Wyndeham Group

BUSINESS

Publisher

Rob Winter

Publishing coordinator

Brenda Fernandes

Advertising consultant

Ronnie Hackston

T: 020 7957 8916

M: 07799 605 212

F: 020 7436 2327

E: ronnie.hackston@bfi.org.uk

Newsstand distribution

Comag Specialist

T: 01895 433800

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Sight & Sound

Abacus e-Media

3rd Floor Chancery Exchange

10 Funnell Street, London, EC4A 1AB

T: 020 8955 7070

F: 020 8421 8244

E: sightandsound@abacusemedia.com

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Editorial Nick James



WISHFUL THINKING

Every once in a while an article gets published that contains nothing a film industry follower wouldn't know already but which does a great job of summarising a situation. Jason Bailey's 'How the death of mid-budget cinema left a generation of iconic filmmakers missing in action' (see Flavorwire.com) muses on how the middle-budget ground, where American auteur cinema once flourished, has been abandoned by Hollywood in favour of the superhero blockbuster, leaving many of the US's greatest film talents high and dry or heading for television.

One appealing aspect of the article is its positivity in the teeth of its own argument. Bailey quotes David Lynch hoping that "Maybe the arthouse will be back in vogue"; *Mad Men*'s Matthew Weiner, baffled that "Nobody can make a movie between \$500,000 and \$80 million. That can't be possible"; and DreamWorks CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg saying, "I'm surprised the superhero stuff has the legs it does, but you look at what Warner Brothers and Marvel have mapped out, you add into it all the Universal monster movies... and you better hope nobody's taste changes... That's not a diverse portfolio!"

Thus we're encouraged to wish for a repeat of the studio failure that led to the New American Cinema of the 1970s, to mid-budget adult auteur-driven dramas of extraordinary inventiveness. And who am I to empty the ice-bucket on that – especially in the midst of the awards season, when the studios roll out their remaining mid-budget dramas in the hope of prestige affirmation? Yet it's clear that nearly all the people Bailey quotes either grew up while that 70s cinema was playing in cinemas or were already making it themselves. Their prognoses smack of wishful thinking, and prompt consideration of other possibilities.

Suppose, for instance, that the Hollywood situation persisted and the less well-heeled young talents of today started to choose a low-fi model of making things at rock-bottom prices? What if the online video mash-up and make-your-own culture gained more attention than the product most distributors bring to cinemas? At the recent *Screen International*/BFI British Film Summit, StudioCanal UK CEO Danny Perkins made such a 'punk' proposition sound unlikely. With so much media activity competing for their attention, he said, "audiences are more discerning and unforgiving than ever". At the same event, we heard from director Amma Asante about the difficulty UK directors – never mind

If the superhero continues to fly high in Hollywood, what cinema has to worry about most is the erosion of its perceived prestige over television, its supposedly superior offer to talent



UK women of colour – have in making their second film. When you think that Ingmar Bergman got to direct more than 50 films, it's perhaps no wonder he made a handful of unimpeachable 'masterpieces' – and that we see very good UK films but not so many masterpieces. The truth is that the UK industry has never been geared to developing prolific directorial talent.

Auteurism, then, is under pressure. Given the fragmented market for all types of specialist cinema, the desire for something punkish to come and refresh an industry is just another form of wishful thinking. Even the prolific international left-field talents of old find it harder than ever to reach the marketplace: Jean-Luc Godard's 3D *Goodbye to Language* was hardly screened in cinemas before its DVD release.

When it comes to middle-budget films and that "diverse portfolio" Katzenberg was talking about, British cinema makes an interesting case-study. The UK films that have featured in 'films of the year' lists and/or been tipped for awards recognition (often a very different pool) – *Belle*, *The Imitation Game*, *Mr. Turner*, *Pride*, *The Theory of Everything* and *Under the Skin* – display a diversity of subject matter and treatment, even if the majority are period pieces. The challenge for the UK remains the old one: only Hollywood has the international marketing muscle to push a film into substantial profits. That's one area where the studios will never let their guard down.

A more positive lesson from the summit was that, despite the digital revolution, cinema screenings will continue to be the best way for a film to launch and to start to generate profit. But set against that is the knowledge that quality long-form television drama is busy welcoming cinema's talent and using similar technology to ever more similar effect. If the superhero continues to fly high in Hollywood, what cinema has to worry about most is the erosion of its perceived prestige, its supposedly superior offer to talent. Perhaps that's why the film awards season seems to be extending its awning across the whole year, so that Oscar chat now begins in April and doesn't end until the February event itself. Oscar is the magic spell that must not be broken. **S**

IN THE FRAME

QUEENS OF COMEDY



On the wrong track: Gloria Swanson waits for the train in *Teddy at the Throttle* (1917)

Some of the funniest comics of the silent era were women – including some stars you might not think of as funny at all

By Lucy Porter

I am a very recent convert to silent cinema. Until about four or five years ago, I did not know that there were silent film comediennees at all. It seems ridiculous now, but I'd only ever heard of Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. And that was all that silent film was to me.

Of all the silent comediennees I've encountered, Marion Davies is my favourite – her lover [the press tycoon William Randolph Hearst] tried to mould her into a serious actress, but she was a natural born clown. And *Show People* (King Vidor, 1928) is my favourite silent film.

I was aware that people said that the film had parallels with Gloria Swanson's life. And that intrigued me because I knew Gloria Swanson as, obviously, Norma Desmond in *Sunset Blvd.*, and as the austere, weird person I'd seen on chat shows. I found her mildly intimidating, so it is nice to discover a different side to her – and to realise that she had started in comedy and that, arguably, she should have stuck with it. In fact, when I saw *Stage Struck* (Allan Dwan, 1925) the first thing I noticed was how utterly adorable she was. She has exactly the kind of goofy everywoman appeal that you still find in the really great modern female comics.

It is a tragedy, when you look at her career – the films that she fought for and she was passionate about, some of those are far less appealing to watch now than *Teddy at the Throttle* (Clarence G. Badger, 1917), a Keystone comedy that she did not enjoy making at all. She had been married to her co-star Wallace Beery, but at this point they had been separated for months, so being forced to act with him was very painful for her.

The most famous scene has Swanson tied to the train tracks, which is one of the tropes of silent film that everyone absorbs, so seeing that parodied in a film of the period is quite cool. In silent films you can very easily identify the types – the vamps and flappers – and it's an easy thing for comedy if stereotypes are very clearly defined, because then you can play with them. They

Au revoir les enfants

"This film is my story. Now it is told at last," were Louis Malle's words after the 1987 premiere of his tale about a friendship between two boys, set in a French boarding school during the German occupation. One of the most personal and devastating films about World War II, it is rereleased in cinemas across the UK from 30 January.



Katharine Hepburn

The irrepressible cinematic force that is Katharine Hepburn takes over London's BFI Southbank for a retrospective in February and March, and strides back into UK cinemas with a rerelease of the classic screwball romance about courtship and sparring, 'The Philadelphia Story' (1940), in time for Valentine's Day.



ON OUR
RADAR



Driving force: Gloria Swanson behind the wheel of a Stutz Roadster

were sending up their own clichés even then.

The other wonderful thing you learn about Swanson when you see her play comedy is just how incredibly short she was. Because she was such a clothes horse I always thought of her as being willowy, but it turns out that she is the same height as me, which is an absolute joy. Being very short or very tall is an asset in comedy: I fall on one side, and Miranda Hart falls on the other. In the late 1920s, when Hal Roach paired Anita Garvin up with Marion Byron to be the female Laurel and Hardy – that was quite an interesting tall girl/short girl combination. As Miranda does now in her sitcom, they used their physicality to great effect.

I love the fact that women who do slapstick are rejecting poise. It's like that famous scene in *The Patsy* (King Vidor, 1928) when Marion Davies does impressions of Lillian Gish and Pola Negri – and makes their serious acting seem so funny. Several silent film stars, including Swanson, had what seems to be a very glacial dignity, so it's endearing when women parody that or when they don't conform to it. Norma

and Constance Talmadge, for example, were both so good at what they did, but Constance, the clown, is my favourite. When it comes to being funny or being sexy, it's comedy that stands the test of time, because fashion changes.

I've been doing comedy for a good 15 years, and within about six months of starting I was already sick to the back teeth of talking about whether women can be funny. Women have never stopped being clowns and doing great physical comedy. The basic loss of dignity and control that is at the heart of slapstick is, if anything, even funnier when it's a very uptight, respectable woman who falls over. It's a comic staple, and long may it continue. 📞

Lucy Porter was talking to Pamela Hutchinson

i Porter is introducing Ernst Lubitsch's *The Marriage Circle* (1925) at the Slapstick Festival in Bristol on 22 January, where Victoria Wood will be introducing *Teddy at the Throttle* and *Stage Struck* on 24 January. Porter will also introduce the Swanson films at the Barbican in London on 25 January

Coming soon in 2015

Abderrahmane Sissako's 'Timbuktu', Joshua Oppenheimer's 'The Look of Silence', Mia Hansen-Løve's 'Eden' and Roy Andersson's 'A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence' are just a handful of the upcoming releases we're looking forward to. The year also promises big things for British cinema, with Andrew Haigh's '45 Years', his follow-up to 'Weekend'; Peter Greenaway's 'Eisenstein in Guanajuato' (both premiering in Berlin alongside Terrence Malick's latest, 'Knight of Cups') and Ben Wheatley's adaptation of J.G. Ballard's dystopic 'High Rise'.



London Short Film Festival

Now in its 12th edition, the festival offers the widest-ranging survey of the artform in the UK, taking in everything from animation to documentary in themed programmes such as 'Lo-Budget Mayhem' and 'A Musical Box'. This year's roster includes new work by Athina Rachel Tsangari and a collaboration between Andrew Köttling and Iain Sinclair entitled 'By Our Selves' (right).



LISTOMANIA WALKING FILMS

As Reese Witherspoon roams the Pacific Crest Trail in Jean-Marc Vallée's *Wild*, we offer a short history of long walks in cinema.

- 1 **The Wizard of Oz** (1939)
Victor Fleming
- 2 **The Ten Commandments** (1956)
Cecil B. DeMille
- 3 **The Incredible Journey** (1963)
Fletcher Markle
- 4 **The Milky Way** (1968)
Luis Buñuel
- 5 **Walkabout** (1970)
Nicolas Roeg
- 6 **Aguirre, Wrath of God** (1972)
Werner Herzog
- 7 **O Brother, Where Art Thou?** (2000)
Joel Coen, Ethan Coen
- 8 **Gerry** (2001)
Gus Van Sant
- 9 **The Road** (2009)
John Hillcoat
- 10 **The Way Back** (2010)
Peter Weir



QUOTE OF THE MONTH SIDNEY LUMET

'When the magic happens, the best thing you can do is get out of the way of the picture. Let it tell you how to do it from now on.'



FORBIDDEN FRUIT

As well as being sexually suggestive, the use of bananas in cinema taps in to a long history of racist imagery



By Hannah McGill

"It's easy to put a banana in someone's gas tank and make money," Spike Lee's regular producer Monty Ross commented in an

interview for *Mother Jones* magazine in 1989. The reference is to a sequence in *Beverly Hills Cop*, which five years before had made masses of money and proved that a black actor could front a mainstream blockbuster; the implication is that unlike Lee's films, *Beverly Hills Cop* was not a significant statement on race, because its black lead was simply playing the ingratiating clown in an otherwise 'white' production. The lead in question, Eddie Murphy, placed the emphasis differently: "I'm the first black actor to take charge in a white world on screen... people had never seen that before," he told *Rolling Stone* in 2011. But whichever perspective seems more apposite with the addition of hindsight, the moment Ross references to emphasise the triviality of *Beverly Hills Cop* rather stands out now, as a locus for the film's anxieties about sex and race.

Murphy's Axel Foley is a fish-out-of-water Detroit cop, unofficially investigating a friend's murder in upscale Beverly Hills; to halt the progress of the two white cops assigned to tail him, he acquires a bunch of bananas from Damon Wayans's affable (and flirtatious) black waiter, and stuffs them into the exhaust pipe of the cop car. The malicious blockage was originally intended to be caused by a potato, according to on-set accounts; bananas were introduced because Axel could convincingly get hold of some at short notice, whereas raw potatoes rarely sit around in fruit bowls. Nonetheless, to have a black actor, already playing the exotic outsider and jester of the piece, make mischief using bananas knowingly connects Axel to a history of racist imagery connecting black people with jungles and monkeys.

Josephine Baker both exploited and mocked the thrill of otherness provided to white audiences by black performers with her '*Danse banane*', for which she wore a skirt made out of cheerfully upturned bananas; when her film *Zouzou* was released in 1934, its French promotional campaign featured bananas printed with her name. Baker was never a Hollywood star, but Brazilian Carmen Miranda certainly was; she was listed by the US Treasury as the highest-earning woman in the United States in the year 1944. (Her nearest acting rivals were Ray Milland, William E. Bendix, Charles Boyer and Monty Woolley, with Cary Grant, Joan Crawford and Humphrey Bogart some way behind.) Though less obviously erotic than Baker's shtick, Miranda's fruit-festooned 'Brazilian bombshell' was also a spectacle based on titillating stereotypes: her brand emphasised exuberance, ditziness and a garish sort of glamour. When Miranda sang 'Bananas Is My Business', she



Top bananas: Josephine Baker's *Danse banane* both exploited and mocked the thrill of otherness



Going bananas: Eddie Murphy in *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984)

wasn't kidding: her fame was actively encouraged by the Roosevelt government as part of its Good Neighbour Policy, which encouraged positive relations with Latin America in order to preserve American commercial interests, including a huge trade in fruit. The American food giant United Fruit lifted Miranda's image for the Chiquita Banana character it still uses today.

If Miranda's cutesy persona was calibrated to evade overt sexual displays, and to package any postcolonial resentment towards white Americans as merely indicative of a cartoonish fieriness, something similar might be said of Murphy's persona as Axel F in *Beverly Hills Cop*. "Murphy allowed white audiences to feel good about themselves for enjoying black performers, without challenging them to complicate their ideas about race," writes Elizabeth Abele in *Home Front Heroes: The Rise of a New Hollywood Archetype, 1988-1999*. The effect of his ambiguous sexual identity is harder to pinpoint. Axel is a distinctly playful and feminised creature; insofar as it operates as a crude sexual gag, the banana in the tailpipe seems to provide reassurance to the audience that his phallic energy is to be directed towards boyish japes rather than any disruption of the sexual order of the society in which he finds

Carmen Miranda's fruit-festooned 'Brazilian bombshell' emphasised exuberance, ditziness and a garish sort of glamour



Carmen Miranda: 'Bananas Is My Business'

himself. It also extends the film's low-level but insistent themes of emotional and sexual tension between men. Alone in his hotel room with Jenny (Lisa Eilbacher), the character ostensibly positioned to provide the film's love interest, Axel is bouncy, brotherly and completely asexual, even when she lies down on his bed; the banana scene follows soon after. Was an interracial relationship considered more of a commercial risk in an action blockbuster than implications of gayness in the lead character? Or was Axel simply written to be discreetly gay, for those who noticed the cues? The matter was complicated at the time by the fact that Murphy had thoroughly alienated gay audiences with outright homophobia in his stand-up film *Delirious* (1983). Meanwhile, if the banana scene offered one unambiguous contribution to movie history, it was the theme written to accompany it: released to international success as 'Axel F', Harold Faltermeyer's electronic earworm went by the working title the 'Banana Theme'. 

THE FIVE KEY...

TEACHER-PUPIL FILMS

As *Whiplash* hits UK cinemas, we go back to the classroom for five films focusing on the relationship between teachers and their charges

By Alice Butler

The peculiar dynamic of the teacher-pupil relationship offers a means to explore a very delicate power structure that relies heavily on notions of trust, discipline and authority. Cinema has long been interested in scrutinising and upending this rapport, often using the classroom as a microcosm to muse on the society and culture to which it belongs. To tie in with the release of Damien Chazelle's extraordinary *Whiplash*, in which J.K. Simmons's formidable music teacher Terence Fletcher torturously drives jazz drummer Andrew Neyman to reach his full potential, we look at five other films in which this intriguing hierarchy plays an integral role.



2 Camouflage (1977)

Krzysztof Zanussi's film focuses on an academic contest in communist Poland, where a young lecturer accepts the late submission of a paper from a brilliant but unpredictable student, raising the ire of the morally bereft provost. What unfolds lays bare the corrupt political landscape of the period, with Zbigniew Zapisiewicz at the helm as a jaded professor, well-acquainted with the implacable system in place.



4 The Piano Teacher (2001)

The notion of discipline within the classroom is brought to extremes in Michael Haneke's unsparing study of a disturbed piano teacher and the sadomasochist relationship she develops with golden boy Benoît Magimel. Using choice extracts from Schubert and the competitive environment of the music school, Haneke draws out the struggles for dominance that drive this sordid and brutalising affair.



1 The Children's Hour (1961)

A second attempt by director William Wyler to adapt Lillian Hellman's play of the same name – after his 1936 film *These Three* – this curiously melodramatic story sees Audrey Hepburn (fresh from filming *Breakfast at Tiffany's*'s earlier the same year) and Shirley MacLaine rendered social outcasts and forced to close their impossibly idyllic school after a scheming student makes claims that her teachers are lovers.



3 Election (1999)

Thirteen years after a career-defining turn as 'snot-nosed punk' Ferris Bueller, Matthew Broderick was cast in this hysterical satire as fusty teacher Jim McAllister to Tracy Flick, a devious overachiever set to become student president. Reese Witherspoon's performance as the young upstart is uncannily convincing, offering insight into what the early life of an American power-seeker might be.



5 The Class (2008)

Laurent Cantet's Palme d'Or-winning drama sees teacher François Bégaudeau handle – and mishandle – the challenges of engaging the attention of a diverse and rowdy group of Parisian teenagers. Repeated altercations with impetuous but discerning student Souleymane eventually leads François's cool exterior to crack, exposing real frustration as well as disquieting insolence just beneath the surface.



"The film combines the muscular force of a Forsythian thriller with something purely eerie, static and atmospheric." Peter Bradshaw -The Guardian

A FILM BY LUCÍA PUENZO

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RONDON CALLING

For director Mariana Rondón, the story of a boy who wants straighter hair was a way of depicting the violence in Venezuelan society

By Mar Diestro-Dópido

The Venezuelan director Mariana Rondón learnt her trade at Cuba's legendary International School of Cinema and Television, which Gabriel García Márquez co-founded in 1986. That, plus the fact she is the daughter of 1960s *guerrilleros*, no doubt accounts for the political sensibility and sense of social engagement that permeates her films, particularly the autobiographical *Postcards from Leningrad*. A few months ago her latest film, *Pelo malo* (*Bad Hair*) – set in the heart of Caracas, Venezuela's chaotic, crowded capital, just before Hugo Chávez's death – was awarded the Golden Shell at the San Sebastián film festival. Of all the many possible stories contained within the endless beehive-like rows of social housing, Rondón focuses on nine-year-old Junior, who lives with his recently widowed, jobless thirty-something mother Marta and baby brother. From within a cacophony of macho bombast, sexism, beauty pageants, street shootings, fanaticism (religious and political) and poverty, Junior sets out to discover his own identity.

The inciting incident comes in the form of a request for a photograph from his school – the perfect opportunity to portray himself as he'd like to be perceived. Instead of dressing up as a soldier (like many of the other young boys whose portraits are on display at the photographer's studio), Junior wants to straighten his unruly curly hair by any means necessary (mayonnaise, oil) and dress up as a singer. His grandmother, who is of Afro-Caribbean descent, helps him, against Marta's wishes: she sees the potential dangers of an image that signals something different from the masculine norm. Junior's coming of age becomes a matter of survival in a world that rejects individual difference.

Mar Diestro-Dópido: What was the initial impetus behind this particular story?

Mariana Rondón: I wanted to make a film about Venezuela. I wanted to speak about the violence we are living with; and about the lack of recognition of the 'other', of the scant respect shown for difference, for not being the same, not thinking the same. I didn't have the story from the beginning, so I just went out into the street searching for such expressions of violence in places where love ought to flourish – in the family, among friends. For me these clearly reflect the violence we are experiencing as a society.

MDD: Why did you choose a nine-year-old boy as your protagonist?

MR: The notion of 'bad hair' is really common in Venezuela and the Caribbean. Of course it originates amongst blacks, but we are all so racially mixed in Venezuela that it's an everyday issue; every woman straightens her hair. And in a society as sexist as this one, with such a prominent military legacy, when a boy says he wants to straighten his hair it unleashes a torrent of prejudices dealt with in the film. If he was a girl it wouldn't be a problem.



Mariana Rondón: 'It's never assumed that there's a violence in women'

MDD: Yet Junior is completely surrounded by women.

MR: Absolutely. This is a matriarchal society in which men hold the symbolic reins of power, but they are not at home helping to raise a generation of boys. This is a society which for the most part is run by women, by the mothers and grandmothers who raise these children.

MDD: But Junior is caught in the power games between his mother and his grandmother.

MR: These women do believe that they are doing the best for this boy. Marta is someone who lacks the tools to do what she wants to, which is caring for him. And somehow this mother is asking her son to do what she's done herself – give up sensuality, sexuality, and adopt instead a masculine stance, in order to defend himself against their surroundings. She's asking him to be like her, and in fact he does look like her. I worked really hard during the casting so they physically resembled each other, and we worked together for almost three months to create their bond.

MDD: As much as mother and son are at the centre of *Pelo malo*, they spend much of their time coming and going by foot and bus, swallowed up by the dwellings and the city, which also become protagonists of the film.

MR: Those buildings are very emblematic not only of Caracas but of modernity in Latin America, originating in the late 50s and early 60s, and inspired by Le Corbusier, who spoke about the utopian city, the garden city for the working-class, for the poorest. Fifty years later there's still much talk about the utopian society, about helping the working classes, yet these type of family dwellings are still being constructed.

I was very interested in capturing the city, more so the centre of Caracas where it is very

In a society as sexist as this one, when a boy says he wants to straighten his hair it unleashes a torrent of prejudices

difficult to film. This is the most chaotic and most polluted – visually and aurally – section of the whole city. But at the same time, this chaos and pollution give you a sort of energy that comes from being so close to life. And when we were checking the rushes, we realised that many of the businesses in the background were hairdressers where you could get your hair straightened. It was as if the city was also talking about it.

MDD: You work surrounded by women, including the co-founder of your production company Sudaca Films, Peruvian filmmaker Marité Ugás [*Pelo malo*'s editor] and your usual DP, Micaela Cajahuaringa. From a female director's point of view, is it a challenge to get films made in Venezuela?

MR: In Venezuela there is a strong culture of respect towards female directors. If you are a Venezuelan female photographer you have many problems, but if you are a director, you don't. The documentary filmmaker Margot Benacerraf founded the Venezuelan Cinematheque in 1966, since when this has been a culture where it's not a bad thing for a woman to be involved in cinema.

What I was never very clear about was if we women offer a different vision to men. With this film, I've noticed that there is indeed a completely different vision, more so because I've confronted a story and an everyday reality that has by and large been filmed only by men in Venezuela. And the violence that men have filmed within this reality is the absolute opposite to the kind I've filmed. In every film depicting a similar location there are at least three guns. That's another kind of violence, which sometimes, for me, is actually less harsh – for me guns are a consequence of violence. And in such films men are violent, but never women. It's never assumed that there's a violence in women, or that women have a way of being violent. With *Pelo malo* I discovered that there is a different world and way of seeing. To believe that violence is just a gun is seriously misguided. ☹

i *Pelo malo* is released on 30 January and is reviewed on page 82

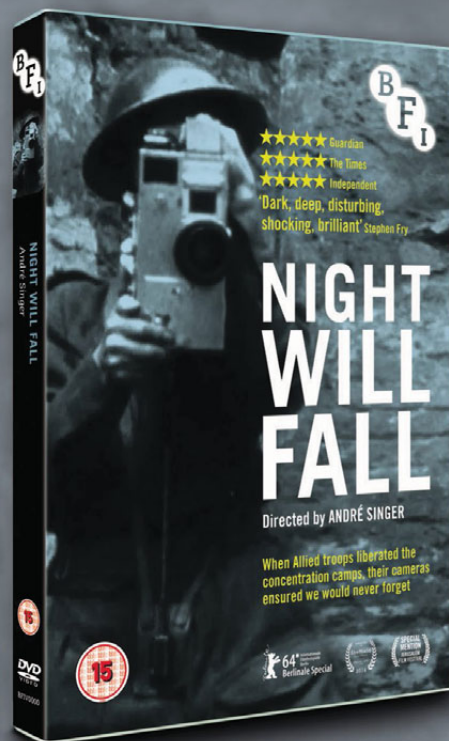
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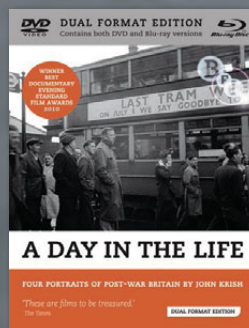
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JOURNEY INTO FEAR

François Truffaut's work as a critic helped fuel my love of film, so I decided it was time to dig out his first ever review and compare notes



By Mark Cousins

Dear François Truffaut, I've been reading your friend Richard Roud's recently published writings about your life. They reminded

me of how much your own films and reviews meant to me when I was falling in love with movies. Your passion for film fuelled mine. You made me feel normal for adoring movies.

Roud writes that the first review you ever had published was of the 1952 RKO thriller *Sudden Fear*, starring Joan Crawford and directed by David Miller. I've never seen it or read your review of it, so I've decided to watch it, write down my thoughts, then read your review and compare notes, like my friends and I do, as if you were still alive, as if more than 60 years hadn't passed between your viewing and mine. TWO HOURS LATER...

François, I've just watched it. You'll recall the plot. Crawford is a rich playwright who falls for *jolie-laide* actor Jack Palance, but along comes Gloria Grahame, younger and more streetwise than Crawford, and suddenly we have a love triangle. Crawford is all MGM – furs and diamonds – Grahame, more Warners. Crawford is still young enough to fall head over heels for Palance, and cinema in 1952 was still young enough to track in for their close-up kiss: love montages; Crawford like a Holbein; Grahame is a skinny malink, a blow-in from the future, the 1960s. Things go wrong, of course, and Crawford cries, her diamond eyes melt. She becomes Norma Desmond. The lighting, by Charles Lang, makes the film look like Italian baroque painting. The

movie's pessimism is almost Nordic, but there's an American sense of the loner. Joan goes it alone, plans her revenge, her romantic comeback.

Sudden Fear is split between Gloria, the kind of girl you could know and be with, and Joan, who's psychic material more than a person. She's what you'd find in our brains if you dissected them. She's all texture, glisten, innards, cats' innards. And as I write this, I realise that the film is too. It's all velvet and sheen: shadows, a great dream sequence, and burnished close-ups of Joan's eyes.

Now I'll read what you wrote.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER...

Wow, you call it a masterpiece. Though it was made in the year of *Singin' in the Rain*, and the first H-bomb test, Corbusier's L'Unité d'Habitation, and the Mau Mau Uprising, which is forever ago to me, we were watching the same film. It hasn't dated. You love its passion, its tension, its emotional directness. You imagine the French public laughing at its melodrama, because they have "lost the habit of intensity". You blame this on tame literary French cinema: "Twenty years of adaptations that are guilty of excessive timidity have made the public accustomed to golden insignificance." Golden insignificance – I wish I'd written that phrase.

And you love Gloria Grahame. You write, "Of all the American stars Gloria Grahame is the only one who is also a person. She keeps, from one film to the next, certain physical tics, that are so many acting inventions and that can only be vainly expected from French actresses." You say, "There is not a shot in this film that isn't necessary to its dramatic progression. Not a shot, either, that isn't fascinating." It's fascinating that you say 'fascinating'. Were you watching as a future

'Sudden Fear' is all velvet and sheen: shadows, a great dream sequence, and burnished close-ups of Joan's eyes

filmmaker, asking yourself where you'd put the camera, and why Miller and Lang placed it as they did? The camera gets closer as the tension builds. At one point it seems attached to a door, behind which Crawford hides, as it swings open. And you compare the way San Francisco is shot in the film to how it appears in Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) and Nick Ray's *They Live by Night* (1948). As I read your review, I felt that it was alive for you and me in the same way.

But there's one thing, François, that I don't get. You clearly like this film because it is so physical, so unafraid of emotion, and so unliterary, so ungentle. Yet two of the least literary, most cinematic things in the film are the dream sequence and Crawford's performance. You call the former "fairly unpleasant" and you say that Crawford is "a question of taste. She takes her place in a category that I label rather crudely the 'Raimu/Magnani tradition'." Yes, she is a question of taste – the minimalism of *High Noon*, which was made the same year as *Sudden Fear*, seems to be a repudiation of the maximalism of her acting style, which many then thought dated. But don't you admire the film because of its foot-to-the-floor emotions? Isn't it great because she isn't hiding behind a bourgeois mask, or because the mask slips, and we see the agony of betrayal?

I wasn't going to tell you this: the sound on the film when I screened it was corrupted, so I had to watch it silent. And yet, shorn of its soundtrack, *Sudden Fear* moved me, and I could follow the story clearly, and I noticed the shot sizes more, and the city more, and the lampshades, gloves, shadows, eyes, clock dials, handkerchiefs, doorways and guns. Watching it silent showed me how good it was, and I was grateful to Crawford for not doing a Garbo, for not hiding everything.

So I'd argue that Crawford's face is a great ingredient in a film, but a sentence in your review reads like a full recipe. You say *Sudden Fear* has "A screenplay with a fine strictness, the face of Gloria Grahame and that street of Frisco whose slope is so steep". What more could we want? 🍷



DEVELOPMENT TALE

INTO THE WOODS



Fairytale romance: James Corden and Emily Blunt as the Baker and the Baker's Wife in *Into the Woods*

It needed trimming, Disneyfication and changes in Hollywood fashion to get Sondheim's sophisticated take on fairytales to the screen

By Charles Gant

In November 1987, Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* triumphantly debuted on Broadway. At this time, musicals were far from a thriving film genre, but this particular stage production, thanks to a story incorporating elements from classic fairytales *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Rapunzel*, did offer an enticing degree of pre-existing audience awareness for its characters. Budding producers Craig Zadan and Neil Meron – who went on to produce *Chicago*, but were then better known for live theatre – persuaded Columbia to finance the development of a screenplay from Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel, a hot writer duo thanks to *Splash* (1984) and *Parenthood* (1989). The Jim Henson Company, known for its groundbreaking work with animatronics and visual effects, boarded as co-producer.

At one stage, Terry Gilliam was mooted as director, and he sent notes on the Ganz-Mandel script. By 1994, the producers were trying to engage the attention of Penny Marshall (*Big*),

and she requested a cast reading to help her get her head round the material. A crack thespian team including Cher, Robin Williams, Goldie Hawn, Steve Martin, Danny DeVito, Roseanne Barr and Kyle MacLachlan duly assembled in the basement of Marshall's Los Angeles home.

Producer Duncan Kenworthy, who was then Henson's UK production head, recalls: "It must have been a very quiet week in Hollywood, because all of the talent agencies somehow pitched in and got this amazing group of people together to do the reading. We were cock-a-hoop. We thought that this would really demonstrate to the studio that this was something that could attract that level of talent, and therefore they should greenlight the movie."

"And, in fact, it did the opposite. They said, 'Well, if you can get that level of talent, but for the budget that it was before, then we'll greenlight it,' which of course nobody could do. We were hoist with our own petard. Movie musicals were nowhere near where they are now, and Sondheim wasn't considered to be a mass-audience proposition. The studio wasn't biting our hand off."

The script laboured in development at Columbia, and at one point Rob Minkoff (*The Lion King*) was attached, but the film did not proceed. It wasn't until 2003, after the Oscar-winning smash *Chicago* revived studios' appetite for movie

musicals, that the film's director Rob Marshall – a former dancer and choreographer – sat down with Sondheim to discuss possible collaborations. The composer suggested *Into the Woods*.

Instead, Marshall went on to do *Memoirs of a Geisha* and *Nine*. In late 2010, during post-production on *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, he finally settled on *Into the Woods* as his next project.

James Lapine, who wrote the book for the stage musical and therefore co-owned the rights, saw a chance to be more creatively involved. "I asked if he would be interested in letting me have a shot at writing the screenplay," Lapine says. The writer admits he wasn't "naïve about the possibility" that Marshall and his producer partner John DeLuca might choose to develop the screenplay further with more established screenwriters. Instead, he stayed the course for the whole writing process, which lasted two-and-a-half years.

The director and writer agreed that the stage musical's running time of around two and a half hours, without intermission, was too long for a film. Says Lapine, "I suggested: 'Gee, maybe we should rethink the opening.' And Rob was, 'No, I really like it.' The opening on the stage is a good 25 minutes, and I thought, 'Woah, can the movie really hold that?' Rob wanted to give it a try. And then we started to edit it and get it down. I thought it was interesting that

he was the one who was sort of honing closer to the original, and I was the one advocating a little bit that we take some liberties.

"It was easier on stage because we had a narrator character, and we both agreed early on that that was not something that would work in a movie. Right off the bat, we jettisoned that idea, which created more issues about how we would get this information across without it being boringly expositional."

In addition to the narrator, the pair eliminated several other characters, which necessitated changes in lyrics, and also the jettisoning of whole songs. Even more than the stage musical, the film finds its narrative thrust and emotional centre in the story of the Baker (James Corden) and his wife (Emily Blunt), who are tasked by the Witch (Meryl Streep) with gathering four totemic objects. For Lapine, "The most painful song to lose was between the Baker and essentially the ghost of his father. Having considerably diminished the role of the father, it didn't make sense to include it, and it was also holding up the drive of the film."

Although Sondheim generally plays to a sophisticated, adult audience, Disney had been hooked by the potential appeal of this material to families, and was aiming for a PG rating. Lapine says, "I think the issue was, things like cutting off heels and toes, and poking people's eyes out, it's a different impact when it's on the stage. You just know that it's not really

If Tim Burton had made it, it would have been very graphic and dark, and that's not the way we chose to do it

happening, it's not graphic. I think Disney was rightly concerned [and determined] that it wasn't going to be a slasher movie. If Tim Burton had made it, there probably would have been tons of blood, and it would have been very graphic and dark, and that's not the way we chose to do it – not that I wouldn't mind that one too."

Movie musicals often chase an Oscar nomination in the Original Song category by adding a fresh composition: Sondheim wrote a new song, 'She'll Be Back', for the Witch to sing when her daughter Rapunzel runs away. "The song was filmed, it played beautifully and Meryl knocked it out of the park. It just didn't help the movie as a whole. It's an odd show. It's so tightly plotted, it's so hard to add anything to it without just elongating it." The new song also undermined the impact of another Witch song near the film's end – "Hearing from her twice negated the second time a little bit," Lapine explains.

As production approached, and Disney set the budget at \$50m, further changes were necessary. Lapine says, "When I first set out to do this with Rob he had just come off *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and he was thinking in terms of this also having a huge budget, but it turned out not to be the scale we had been envisioning. We had to go back into the script and tailor things, and cut locations. By the way, nobody misses them but me." ☹

i **Into the Woods opens on 9 January and is reviewed on page 75**

THE NUMBERS 2014 IN REVIEW

By Charles Gant

More than ever before, arthouse box office, in 2014, proved a year of haves and have-nots. The haves: several well-established auteur directors working in the English language who achieved their biggest ever hits, in many cases with a huge improvement on their previous best. The have-nots: the whole theatrical market for foreign language, which yielded just one non-Bollywood film grossing more than £1m, namely action sequel *The Raid 2*.

First, the haves. Martin Scorsese achieved a personal best in the UK with *The Wolf of Wall Street* (£22.7m), which also earned the distinction of becoming the biggest ever 18-certificate film here. The same period saw Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* confound industry expectations when it clocked up more than £20m in cinema grosses – a number that many summer blockbusters struggle to achieve (*Godzilla* did £17.2m). *American Hustle*, with £13.7m, surged ahead of all David O. Russell's previous hits *Silver Linings Playbook* (£5.3m), *The Fighter* (£6.3m) and *Three Kings* (£7.0m).

In March, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* landed, eventually grossing £11.2m. Wes Anderson's previous best in live action was *The Royal Tenenbaums*, with £3.3m. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* even sailed past Anderson's family animation *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (£9.2m).

The summer proved typically quiet, but then *Mr. Turner* arrived in October, with box office at press time standing at £6.3m. The film has already earned two-and-a-half times the number achieved by Mike Leigh's previous biggest hit, *Vera Drake* (£2.4m).

Considered a pretty dismal year for foreign-language cinema, 2013 saw nine non-Bollywood films achieve box office in excess of £300,000. In 2014, the number dropped to just six. The Nordic noir surge of recent years seems to have petered out, although Sweden did deliver the black comedy *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed out of the Window and Disappeared*. The whole of Latin America struggled to land a commercial punch – most successful was *The Golden Dream*, with £42,000. Increasingly, foreign-language films are being released simultaneously on premium VoD platforms such as Curzon Home Cinema, which might be contributing to the softening of theatrical numbers.

In documentary, most of the hits had their numbers boosted by live events that were beamed into cinemas – a live component helped add a lot of lustre to the totals achieved by *20,000 Days on Earth* (£551,000) and *Hockney* (£189,000). *Finding Vivian Maier* (£241,000) and *20 Feet from Stardom* (£206,000) were rare documentaries that achieved decent totals the good old-fashioned way. Overall, event cinema experienced a breakthrough year, with *Billy Elliot the Musical Live* topping the weekend box-office chart – the first time a piece of alternative content has ever done so. Denzel Washington's expensive new thriller *The Equalizer*, which benefited from multiple showtimes across its debut Friday-to-Sunday play period, was essentially beaten by a one-off cinema transmission of a stage musical. In August, Secret Cinema's *Back to the Future* set a new record for event cinema, with takings of £3.5m from a single venue. ☹

FOREIGN-LANGUAGE FILMS AT UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE, 2014

Film	Gross
The Raid 2	£1,082,556
Two Days, One Night	£715,785
The Lunchbox	£487,006
Ida	£453,760*
Yves Saint Laurent	£425,647
The Hundred-Year-Old Man...	£420,664
The Past	£243,479
Bogowie	£224,610
Mood Indigo	£199,597
Leviathan	£187,650

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SPECIALISED TITLES AT UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE, 2014

Film	Gross
The Wolf of Wall Street	£22,699,724
Gone Girl	£22,258,264*
12 Years a Slave	£20,030,132
American Hustle	£13,732,453
The Imitation Game	£12,413,559*
The Grand Budapest Hotel	£11,163,349
Mr. Turner	£6,325,124*
The Railway Man	£5,333,988
Dallas Buyers Club	£5,298,406
Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom	£4,450,080

Grosses to Dec 14 2014; *still on release; foreign chart excludes Bollywood films

IF YOU BUILD IT...

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

If we want a thriving exhibition landscape in a generation's time, we need investment to establish a younger, more diverse audience



By Ben Roberts

Over the past two years, as part of our ambition to grow audiences for less mainstream – particularly British – cinema, the BFI has

been setting up the Film Audience Network (or FAN for short), which consists of nine film exhibition hubs spanning the UK.

Each hub works across a membership of multiplex, commercial independent, arthouse and community venues (there are more than 700 members to date) and gets Lottery funding to join up and deliver film activity that potentially will reach a larger UK audience, giving the exhibition sector the confidence to make bolder choices in its programming. Crucially, it's also an opportunity for them to share knowledge, data and their experiences of audiences to better arm themselves in the battle for eyeballs.

This month I was invited to the Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle to make some opening remarks at This Way Up, a new annual two-day conference organised by three of the film hubs and aimed at provoking a discussion around how the exhibition sector can better innovate in order to retain and build its audiences in the face of the continued dominance of mainstream American films.

I headed there with good reason to be positive about the appetite for British cinema. The previous weekend, four of the top ten films at the box office were British independent films (*The Imitation Game*, *Paddington*, *Mr. Turner*, and *Nativity 3*) and they accounted for 75 per cent of the box office. Eleven months into 2014, British independent films had a market share of 16 per cent, twice the average (but in a soft year for the studios, and with the Christmas belters to come).

But British success can be fitful and unpredictable, and 2015 will likely be the noisiest and most successful year on record for the Hollywood studios on record. So exhibitors need to think on their feet.

If we want a thriving exhibition landscape in a generation's time, we need investment to establish a younger, more diverse audience. That audience is not only underserved by alternatives to mainstream film, but might increasingly regard the big-screen experience as irrelevant. Ofcom statistics show that while on average we spend more than four hours a day watching audiovisual content, the younger the age group the greater the proportion of

Evidence suggests that social media and portable devices are playing havoc with our viewing habits and attention spans



The BFI Sci-Fi event at Jodrell Bank Observatory

this time spent on short videos online.

Spending two hours in front of a single big screen might become not just irrelevant, but impossible. I pointed to other evidence that suggests how social media and portable devices are playing havoc with our viewing habits and attention spans: more time is spent by young people watching videos online than watching TV; our attention span has dropped from an average of 12 minutes to five over ten years; when left on their own the average person will take just 30 seconds before they look at their phone; the average office worker will check their email 30-40 times an hour. There are studies of young people who experience phantom phone vibrations and restlessness when their phones are taken off them...

So for me, the real value of an event like This Way Up was to get a conversation going about adapting the big-screen experience to a 'second screen' world. Several discussions looked at ways in which the sector can embrace a change in viewing habits.

Abandon Normal Devices ("a regional festival of new cinema, digital culture and art") gave a presentation on the 'tweetalong' and other social interactivity in cinemas. Social media can be reductive (where news is communicated in 140 characters, video-watching tends to be less than ten minutes), but it is also inherently communal, and the big screen offers a shared experience missing from watching films on portable devices. So how do you adapt it?

A.N.D. recently produced a hugely successful event at the Jodrell Bank Observatory for the BFI Sci-Fi season, creating audiovisual projections from *Alien* and 2001: *A Space Odyssey* on the Lovell Telescope and encouraging interaction on social media. It was a sell-out. Other 'live' and interactive events for recent releases of 20,000 *Days on Earth* and *Hockney* have galvanised the box office in ways that wouldn't have happened with a traditional release. I suspect that their box-office takes (£551,000 and £189,000, respectively) were doubled by their 'live' events.

The weekend before This Way Up, Film Hub North and Ilkley Film Festival organised a "cut, paste, scratch and mix odyssey into science fiction" with DJ Yoda in Wakefield. A massive 8,000 people turned up: on that basis the future could be bright – but cinemas, venues, festivals, filmmakers might have to adapt to see it. @bfiben

IN PRODUCTION

● **Bruno Dumont**, who made a successful move into television with last year's *Li'l Quinquin*, looks to be a busy man. He is reportedly working on a second season of *Li'l Quinquin*, as well as the very intriguing sounding *Jeanette*, a "rock and roll musical" TV series based on the childhood of Joan of Arc. Dumont is reportedly also readying *Ma Loute*, a feature film comedy about two warring families, set in Pas-de-Calais in the early 20th century. It will be co-produced by 3B and Arte France Cinéma, and shooting begins in summer 2015.

● **Stéphane Brizé** is another French director receiving support from Arte France Cinéma for his next feature. The director of *Mademoiselle Chambon* and *A Few Hours of Spring* is preparing to shoot *A Simple Man*, a film starring Vincent Lindon as an unemployed 51-year-old who takes a job in a supermarket and is asked to spy on his colleagues.

● **Kurosawa Kiyoshi**, the Japanese director of *Bright Future*, *Tokyo Sonata*, *Seventh Code* and the recently completed *Journey to the Shore*, is to direct his first project outside Japan with an as-yet-untitled Paris-set romantic drama. Tahar Rahim, star of *A Prophet* and Asghar Farhadi's *The Past*, is to star.

● **Amma Asante**, who is already at work on her third feature *Unforgettable*, her follow-up to last year's *Belle*, has also announced her fourth feature, *Where Hands Touch*, a romantic drama about a mixed-race woman's relationship with an SS officer during World War II. Pinewood Pictures will finance the project.

● **James Ellroy** is scripting a remake of Otto Preminger's classic 1944 noir *Laura* for Twentieth Century Fox, and has confirmed that his version relocates the action from New York to London. Ellroy has reportedly also written a script for *Shakedown*, a TV series set in 1950s Los Angeles.

● **Paul Verhoeven** (below) hasn't directed a feature since *Black Book* in 2006 (though he made the 55-minute *Tricked* in 2012), but looks set to return with *Elle*, a thriller about a woman who gets romantically involved with a man who raped her, adapted from the 2012 novel "Oh..." by Betty Blue author Philippe Djian. Isabelle Huppert stars, and shooting is set to begin this month in Paris.



IDFA

LIFE IN THE BALANCE

Entries on the trauma of war and life on the margins of Russian society won awards, while a symposium assessed the status of women in film

By Nick Bradshaw

Last year in these pages I noted how hit-and-miss a festival as compendious as IDFA, Amsterdam's International Documentary Festival, can be. This year I'm glad to report almost no misses in four days of film-watching, thanks to some combination of luck and success in getting my ear to the ground. The festival may still incline more than some to industry-friendly forms and social-issue content (whereas the *S&S* website is now stacked with hosannas to the form-upturning derring-do of Copenhagen's November CPH:DOX), but this year's programme offered long hard looks at both the world and documentary film itself, in particular (a subject also recently raised in these pages) gender representation.

A busy half-day symposium on the 'Female Gaze' in documentary threw up far more talking points than I can unpack here – I'll write it up online – but I'll quote a couple of statistical shockers from IDFA's own research: across 2003-13, while the festival's proportion of female-directed entries and selections hovered between 30 and 40 per cent, the level for Dutch documentaries was 52 per cent, and for the family 'Kids & Docs' strand was more than 69 per cent; but the proportion of female directors chosen in the *Desert Island Discs*-style 'Top 10' strand was just 13 per cent. Over the same period, juries made up of a majority of women gave 48 per cent of their prizes to female filmmakers, while the rate sinks to 36 per cent of audience awards and 28 per cent of awards by male-majority juries. This year the festival had invited only female-majority juries, and raised its selection rate to 40 per cent – above the 38 per cent submissions figure.

I managed to see six films directed by women, five by men. That was without even having time to dip into the riches of the Female Gaze historical sidebar or the back catalogue of Peruvian-Dutch 'Living Legend' Heddy Honigmann, the subject of this year's Retrospective. Honigmann herself let down the gender stats with her latest, *Around the World in 50 Concerts*, a buoyant portrait of Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra from street to concert hall, which featured only male characters: this was just the way it took shape, she told her audience. I felt Wim Wenders and Julianio Ribeiro Salgado were more culpable in *The Salt of the Earth*, their otherwise wonderful tribute to Salgado's father, the legendary photographer Sebastião: Lélia Salgado comes across in the telling as the archetypal great woman standing behind a great man, but remains near invisible.

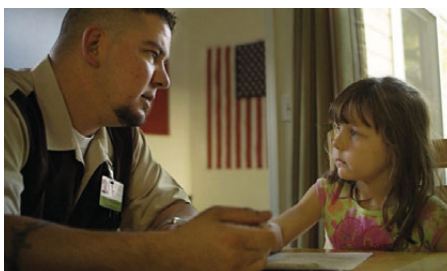
If, as critic Dana Linssen argued at the Female Gaze symposium, women are still too often the Other in cinema, there were plenty of other



'A vision of hell worthy of Dante': *Something Better to Come*

Others with whom IDFA's best films forged links of empathy. In Laurent Bécue-Renard's *Of Men and War* the Other was the brusque, bristling, closed-up American ex-army grunts, filmed over five years in and out of a clinic treating Iraq War veterans for post-traumatic stress disorder. Bécue-Renard's witness-bearing camera puts us in the same position as their half-estranged wives and girlfriends, soliciting their stories and thus coaxing them towards peace by offering them time and love. It rightly won the Best Feature-Length Documentary award; as Joshua

'Of Men and War' confronts us with our fragility as humans, revealing that we must treat each other with gentleness and love



Of Men and War

Oppenheimer's jury declared, it's "a film that confronts us with our fragility as human beings, revealing that we must treat each other with gentleness and love... Men once proud of their physical strength are revealed to be fragile and broken, haunted by shame and guilt... A more powerful anti-war film is hard to imagine."

Possibly even more gruelling was Hanna Polak's *Something Better to Come*, shot over 14 years among the denizens of Europe's largest rubbish heap, outside Moscow. It won the Special Jury Award: "A vision of hell worthy of Dante," the jury remarked, "all the more painful for its tenderness." The film finds a silver lining to cling to, and you cling with fear, sadness and awe.

Camilla Nielsson tracked the protagonists of *Democrats* – two politicians from rival parties, now working together to create a new constitution for Zimbabwe – across a mere three years. It makes for a great yarn, spiced with clashing characters, power plays and shifting dynamics, virtue, conspiracy and farce – and it is a shaggy-dog story, told under the Kafkaesque sign of Mugabe. And Maite Alberdi's bittersweet *Tea Time* watched the (tea) leaves fall as a group of Chilean octogenarian former schoolfriends gathered, in diminishing numbers, over four years for cake and memories. It won the Alliance of Women Film Journalists' Award for Best Female-Directed Documentary, and I loved its unapologetic roundtable minimalism. 

STRANGE DAZE

Paul Thomas Anderson's *'Inherent Vice'*, a freewheeling adaptation of Thomas Pynchon's picaresque novel, sees Joaquin Phoenix play a stoner detective against the backdrop of a Californian hippie culture soured in the wake of the Manson killings

By Jonathan Romney

In the early 70s, Neil Young recorded three LPs that became known to fans as the 'Ditch Trilogy'. In 1972, he had a hit with 'Heart of Gold', from the bestselling *Harvest*, an album aglow with West Coast bonhomie. But that wasn't where his heart was. Young subsequently alienated much of *Harvest's* audience with three albums that are among the bleakest and most clear-sighted in the North American singer-songwriter canon: *Time Fades Away*, *Tonight's the Night* and *On the Beach*. The latter is a savagely downbeat evocation of the comedown that followed the death of 60s utopian dreams, especially on 'Revolution Blues', in which a Charles Manson figure dreams of massacring the inhabitants of Los Angeles. "Heart of Gold" put me in the middle of the road," Young later said. "Traveling there soon became a bore so I headed for the ditch."

You could say that Paul Thomas Anderson has now completed his own 'Ditch Trilogy'. The writer-director established himself with a series of jubilant, emotionally direct films, wildly diverse in mood and in their increasing formal ambition: *Hard Eight* (aka *Sydney*, 1996), *Boogie Nights* (1997), *Magnolia* (1999) and then *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), a flip romantic comedy, albeit one with a profound streak of melancholy and a rarefied pop-art aesthetic. Then Anderson headed, if not into the ditch, then on to an unexplored side road of his own, with two unapologetically serious films that mined a deep seam of madness in modern American history: *There Will Be Blood* (2007) and *The Master* (2012), as close to unstable, perplexing 'open texts' as anything recently produced at the edge of the US mainstream.

Now comes *Inherent Vice*, the third part of Anderson's 'Ditch Trilogy'. If I stress the Neil Young comparison, it's because the singer casts a long shadow over the film. Anderson uses two of his numbers in it, and pointed out, when I interviewed him recently in London, that his protagonist, hippie sleuth 'Doc' Sportello (Joaquin Phoenix), visually resembles Young with his muttonchop whiskers and fatigue jacket. But *Inherent Vice* is directly inspired by an even more exalted counterculture hero: the elusive (both personally and in his fiction) Thomas Pynchon, whose 1970-set meta-thriller, published in 2009, Anderson has faithfully adapted.

In theory, *Inherent Vice* should have all it takes to get Anderson out of the 'difficult art' ditch and back on to the commercial highway: an all-star cast (including Josh Brolin, Owen Wilson and Reese Witherspoon), brassy visuals and a knockabout comedy sensibility. At least that's the impression you get with regard to those last two aspects from watching Anderson's own trailer, which suggests a carnival of fast cuts, goofy





EYE ON THE PRIZE
Joaquin Phoenix plays private investigator 'Doc' Sportello in *Inherent Vice*, which sees Paul Thomas Anderson dispense with his usual stylistic flamboyance in favour of disarming modesty

pratfalls and whip-smart double takes. In reality, the film has a very different feel, suffused with a languid end-of-era *tristesse* that is close in some ways to the wistfulness of *Punch-Drunk Love*, and refuses conventional dramatic focus no less than *The Master*.

But *Inherent Vice* offers a differently perplexing Anderson film. It doesn't seem to aim for the stars as his last two films did, and compared with the overt maestria of some major American auteur movies of 2014 – *Birdman*, *Gone Girl*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* – *Inherent Vice* is disarmingly modest. It contains the odd big elaborate tableau and staged shot – a handful of exteriors with a highly designed, Wes Anderson-ish symmetry; a panorama of hippies arranged to resemble Leonardo's *The Last Supper* – but those are few. Instead, the film focuses on a series of extended dialogues, usually indoors, as Doc meets a lengthy roster of characters connected with his case. The film doesn't feel narratively or stylistically 'orchestrated', but comes across more like a free-associative jam session, a succession of eccentric solos and spiky duets.

But just what is Doc's case? Hard to say exactly. Initially, it involves his former girlfriend, or "ex old lady" in the film's hippie speak, Shasta Fay (Katherine Waterston, terrific in a breakthrough role), who's worried about her missing lover, a property magnate. It also involves a neo-Nazi biker fraternity, a Black Power militant, an errant surf saxophonist and other denizens high and low of Pynchon's alternative early-70s Los Angeles, in particular of 'Gordita Beach', a fictional version of the South Bay's Manhattan Beach, where Pynchon reputedly lived during the period in question. It also involves the mysterious 'Golden Fang', which may be an Asian smuggling cartel, a lost schooner, a syndicate of tax-scamming dentists or all – or none – of the above.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

Now this will either sound like a lot of fun to you, or no fun at all: John Updike famously said of reading Pynchon, "I don't like the funny names and I don't like the leaden feeling of the cosmos that he sets for us." But if you enjoy the novelist's cartoonish – sometimes stygian, sometimes Day-Glo – absurdism, and if you're open to free-associative stoner humour (Doc is Philip Marlowe as a fourth Furry Freak Brother), *Inherent Vice* should be for you.

Personally, I found the film beguilingly rum, not least because Anderson seems deliberately to jettison his one-time stylistic flamboyance to create something that is at once flip, casual and wilfully undemonstrative – which might make it, to invoke a different songsmith, the director's own *Basement Tapes*. Regarding comedy, Anderson recently enthused about *Airplane!*, the *Police Squad!* TV show and *The Naked Gun* spin-offs; but rather than those titles' breakneck goofiness, *Inherent Vice* has the befuddled languor of stoner comics Cheech and Chong, another comparison the director has cited. There's plenty of horseplay in *Inherent Vice*, but it tends to turn to ugliness or violence. The trailer cuts away when Doc is shouldered aside by an LAPD officer walking past him, but in the film, the shot is extended, camera panning to follow Doc as he flops on the pavement, giving the gag a brutal dying fall. In a scene with junkie mother Hope Harlingen (a show-stealingly affecting Jena Malone), Doc gives a comically exaggerated shriek when she shows him a photo. The image appears in the trailer, and in a publicity still,

but viewed in context, Doc's reaction is more disturbing: he has seen a picture of Hope's heroin-ravaged child. Throughout the film, gags played out at length acquire a nightmarish lugubriousness: Doc's nemesis-cum-counterpart, brutal but obscurely simpatico hippie-hating cop 'Bigfoot' Bjornsen (Josh Brolin), stomps on Doc in slow motion – and goes on stomping, and stomping...

Then there are the Byzantine complexities of the film's dialogue. True to Pynchon's text, it's hard to follow in the first place, but it is often almost drowned out by music, either by Jonny Greenwood's languid, Debussy-esque orchestrations, or by a mix of obscure surf tracks, Les Baxter exotica and cop-show TV themes, a selection prompted by the book itself. Given that Anderson's cast includes actors not exactly famed for the bell-like clarity of their delivery (Owen Wilson, Benicio del Toro), the dialogue often ceases to be audible as dialogue and becomes abstract music; in a largely whispered scene between Wilson and Phoenix, their voices float airily like flutes. The plot isn't hard to follow just because of its Chandler-style complications, but because each new episode, each new parcel of expository dialogue, tends to wipe out, rather than build on, what's come before: befitting a movie set at the edge of the ocean, the scenes are like waves, each washing over the traces of the last.

There is also the matter of character. With his penchant for broad sketching (bizarro personality traits, quirks of language, ludicrous names like Sortilège, Riggs Warbling, Sauncho Smilax), Pynchon has never been in the business of creating larger-than-life characters who will stay in your mind forever. Consequently, Anderson's people are essentially chimeric apparitions who briefly flare up on screen, then vaporise – like Doc's foghorn-voiced, grotesquely made-up Aunt Reet (Jeannie Berlin), who gets a series of glaring close-ups at the start, never to be seen again. Brolin's Bigfoot is a set of droll variations on the archetypal flat-topped Establishment goon of hippie nightmare, while the most lurid apparition is lecherous dentist Dr Rudy Blatnoyd, seen pawing nymphets, snorting coke and prancing about, mutton dressed as scenester lamb, in *Austin Powers* velvet. It's the sort of role Peter Sellers trademarked in films such as *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas!* (1968), and which 80s/90s comedy stalwart Martin Short pulls off here with farceur's panache.

HIGH TIMES

Throughout the film Joaquin Phoenix's Doc appears sexually helpless and mystified when confronted by women, such as Reese Witherspoon's Penny (right); Doc with Sauncho Smilax, played by Benicio del Toro (below)





As for the film's female characters, many of them are there to screw with Doc's hormones, as well as his mind, and are effectively depicted as sex cartoons: vampish, swimwear-clad socialite Sloane Wolfmann (Serena Scott Thomas), whose characterisation seems to be a nod to Nina van Pallandt in Robert Altman's revisionist Chandler adaptation *The Long Goodbye* (1973); wiseacre Chinese sex worker Jade (Hong Chau); and the sexually hard-nosed Clancy (Michelle Sinclair, aka porn star Belladonna, making a tough, impressive mainstream debut). To a large degree, Anderson casts these women for a particular period look – notably Waterston, first seen in an orange mini-dress that exudes a perfect Californian golden glow, and who perfectly resembles the flower child/surfer girl waifs of late 60s film, TV and pop (Leigh Taylor Young, Peggy Lipton, Michelle Phillips).

Waterston features in the film's most troubling scene, in sexual politics terms – a single six-minute take, in which a naked Shasta works the fully dressed Doc's crotch with her foot, before goading him into spanking her before sex. The film's one overtly erotic moment, it unarguably shows Shasta taking the upper hand; in fact, throughout the film, Doc seems sexually helpless and mystified when confronted by all these women. Indeed, you could argue that the film is fundamentally feminised by Anderson's decision to allot the voiceover narration to an incidental character, hippie mystic Sortilège, played – in another inspired casting coup – by the unashamedly neo-hippie singer-harpist Joanna Newsom. Even so, it's hard to know whether the film is ironising the sexism of flower-power culture, or simply channelling it. It's also hard to tell whether Anderson is being disingenuous when I asked him about this in the interview; he certainly seems to be playing it somewhat in 60s character, talking about discussing “ex old ladies” with Phoenix.

It is, of course, as fruitless to puzzle over what the film ultimately ‘means’ as it is to ask that question of Pynchon's novel. The book is sometimes direct about its real-world themes – for example, the souring of the Californian dream in the wake of the Manson murders, the recuperation of 60s utopian values by “the ancient forces of greed and fear”. Still, it's hard to see the novel's universe as ‘real’ according to the standard criteria of literary realism: after all, it depicts an America in which you can enter a restaurant and order jellyfish croquettes and eel Trovatore. While *Inherent Vice* is probably Pynchon's most adaptable novel, his is a type of storytelling in which linearity is only ever superficial, in which chains of events really tend to frieze-like simultaneity.

‘Inherent vice’, if you're wondering, is a legal term relating to certain goods being uninsurable because of their essential nature: eg, eggs break. Pynchon's use of the phrase connotes original sin and the essential fallibility of all things; but read the title (as may well be his design) as *In(co)herent Vice*, and the point becomes that the fallen state of the world (of the hippie dream, of America, of modernity) is chaos, mess, unreadability.

No wonder Anderson's film is hard to assess. *Inherent Vice* can feel like a wild party at which you're the only person who isn't stoned, but there are many pleasures to be had from it, and its overall tenor is tender and oddly moving (you'll see what I mean when you see the closing shot, and hear Greenwood's elegiac sign-off music). I can't yet decide whether the film is a bold, quixotic misfire, or something more elusive that finds its own idiosyncratic way to emulate the beat of Pynchon's jazzy, wandering discursiveness. Is Anderson doing something extraordinary, or (to use a canonical Neil Young line) “just pissing in the wind”? The jury's still out, man... But hey, like Doc Sportello says, “Don't worry, thinking comes later.” 🍷

‘Inherent Vice’ can feel like a wild party at which you’re the only person who isn’t stoned, but there are many pleasures to be had from it

'IT'S FUNNY. WHY ARE YOU SAD?'

Paul Thomas Anderson describes the influence of Neil Young, the talents of Thomas Pynchon and the appeal of 60s 'Playboy', and explains why crane shots are a terrible waste of money, time and film

Jonathan Romney: The film's trailer – which you worked on – suggests that it's going to be really broad knockabout. In fact, while the film is definitely a comedy, it nevertheless comes across overall as very serious and melancholic.

Paul Thomas Anderson: Yeah. Oh God... [laughs] You know, I remember showing this film to a friend and he kind of got teary about it, and I was looking at him and saying, "No, it's funny – why are you sad?" I tried to make the film feel kind of like a Neil Young song – like that melancholy of 'Only Love Can Break Your Heart' or 'After the Gold Rush'. That's an equivalent to what the book feels like to me. Amidst all these ridiculous gags, there's a sentimental – in a good way – nostalgia, aching, look back. Pynchon's close to 80, and it doesn't feel like some ex-hippie looking back going, "The drugs were so good and the music was so good, man." [Instead, he's saying] "We had this thing at our fingertips and it fucking crumbled."

JR: The book, and the film, deal with a huge nexus of themes – the Manson killings, Black Power, the commercialisation of the hippie dream – and a whole series of cultural shifts in which the recent past is still present in 1970 Los Angeles.

PTA: There's a really interesting documentary, *Mondo Hollywood*, made in 1967 by Robert Carl Cohen, and it's got Old Hollywood – and I mean silent movie stars, ageing beauties. They've got these houses in Beverly Hills and they're all having tea in hats – and they've got hippies roaming in and out of their parties... There's a little bit more of that in the book than we were able to get in. You've got characters from the blacklist era – like this Burke Stodger [actor] character. So yeah, this weird mash of all these different things.

JR: It's not an easy narrative to follow, and the dialogue isn't easy to follow either. I found myself listening to the dialogue almost on a purely aesthetic level, as if it were abstract, like music.

PTA: Right. I think that's good. I'm not one who ever follows plots in movies, ever – I just glaze over. But that thing that Pynchon does – you're taking in the same amount of information that you might take in on any day just reading the newspapers, an overload



Paul Thomas Anderson: 'I'm not one who ever follows plots in movies, ever. I just glaze over'

of information. Opening the newspaper every morning feels like reading a Thomas Pynchon book. In his era, he was writing about stuff that felt like distant conspiracy theories. Now it feels like everybody's in your face, it's like, "We do this – what are you going to do about it? Yes, we look at your phone."

The pieces do connect, the way they do in the book, and you want to make sure that they do add up. I followed it so much more in terms of mood, and sometimes allowing it to be music – whether you have music actually playing along with it or not.

It can frustrate people too. [But] I think it's to do with following Joaquin. If you're with [Doc] and you care about him and you see what he cares about and what he's paranoid about, then chances are, most

I tried to make the film feel kind of like a Neil Young song – like that melancholy of 'Only Love Can Break Your Heart' or 'After the Gold Rush'

people who can go with that go with the film. Ultimately, all of it is dressing to the thing that I would think is relatable to most people – which is chasing your ex old lady. That girl who you really shouldn't have any business trying to be with any more, but there you are, chasing it down still... That's a hook that everyone can get with, for sure – once all that political stuff washes away.

JR: How did you develop the character with Joaquin Phoenix?

PTA: He read the script first, then he read the book, then I gave him a bunch of Neil Young stuff, and then I gave him a documentary called *The Most Dangerous Man in America*, about Daniel Ellsberg, the CIA and the [leaked] Pentagon Papers, about a man who put forward all the facts that the government was completely complicit in Vietnam. That was like a bomb going off in America – like, you really can't trust the government. Outside that, our conversations were about ex old ladies – and those conversations were probably the most important.

JR: Doc seems a third stage of Philip Marlowe – after Chandler and Bogart, after

Altman and Elliott Gould's version in *The Long Goodbye*. He's the full stoner version.

PTA: I know *The Long Goodbye* obviously and I know *The Big Sleep* and I know *The Big Lebowski*, but I think Pynchon had this character who was smart, but who was discovering things that he was still surprised by – still shocked and surprised to learn one piece of information after the other, while probably deep down he did know it all already, he just refused to believe that it was true. I don't know Chandler's books that well, but they're about the classic sentimental detective – again, sentimental in a good way, nostalgic... [Doc] is a sentimental 'ex old man', he's heartbroken, that's a good thing for a character. Or [he's] the character who does solve the case – maybe he can't tell you exactly how he did it, but he did it, maybe through just his good will.

JR: It seems as if you're channelling an unreconstructed 60s style of sexual politics, especially in Shasta's nude scene.

PTA: That's too smart for me, I wouldn't be able to understand those arguments at all. Really?

JR: Well, the dream of the inaccessible Californian golden girl seems very much of its moment. Although Shasta is very much in control in that scene.

PTA: Well, I think the good lines in there are her saying, "What do you expect me to be? What kind of girl do you need exactly? Do you want me to be one of those Manson chicks? Do you want me to be one of those submissive brainwashed horny little teenagers who do exactly what you want before you even know what it is?"

JR: But the film's eroticism is right out of late 60s *Playboy* – the swimwear, the ass shots...

PTA: Nothing wrong with that – sounds great! When we were casting this movie, [we saw] so many actresses – but they were modern beautiful, a certain body type. Katherine [Waterston] looks exactly like one of those centrefolds of that era. And the job is to try and present that as accurately as possible.

JR: The visual tone is strange. As the trailer suggests, you have certain very staged shots, panoramas and 'big canvas' moments like *The Last Supper* – but they're so brief, you almost throw them away and move on to the dialogue scenes, which are dominated by long takes and close-ups.

PTA: It's claustrophobic. We thought, "This is gonna be great, we're gonna make a beach movie!" – we were at the beach for one fucking day! I knew what we had on our hands: an episodic piece, where the hero goes and talks and collects information over and over and over again for two and a half hours. Then it needed punctuations to unclaustrophobic it, to open it up. I came up in an era where, if you're making a period film, you're obligated to have an



The ex old lady: Joaquin Phoenix's Doc, with Katherine Waterston as Shasta Fay Hepworth in *Inherent Vice*

unmotivated crane shot in the street – a mass of cars, a mass of billboards. What a waste of money, time and feet of film. An avenue to hopefully making an audience feel they're inside a film was to get rid of those. That coupled with not having enough money – it was just, "What is the minimum we need to do to open it up and get on with the most important thing?" People just want to see what Joaquin Phoenix is doing, they just want to see the next cute girl, let's get on with it.

JR: But you take that to a perverse level: we get two mere glimpses of *The Last Supper*, which must have taken some setting up.

PTA: But that's good. You spend so much time when you start out trying to be a professional – and then you spend a long time trying to make things

unprofessional, throw them away or make things dirty, make things accidental.

JR: You shot on film, and capture a look that evokes late 60s images of California, with a particular light. How did you and DP Robert Elswit achieve that?

PTA: I remember Los Angeles in the mid-70s when the air quality was far different – there used to be smog days, when you couldn't play outside because of the smog. The idea was to make it feel a little bit like a faded postcard, an album cover or paperback. We were shooting tests and I had a stack of old film from ten years before that had been sitting in my garage, so it had all this heat damage – we were filming with that, and when we saw that stuff, it was great. It was faded, the blacks weren't very black, it was milky, it was a sort of instant flashback. So you try to recreate that feeling in terms of exposure and old lenses.

JR: In terms of music, you throw a curveball at the start by using a song from the period, but by a German band – Can's 'Vitamin C'. And then, Jonny Greenwood's score uses flute, which could have sounded flower power – but is more like Debussy.

PTA: Yeah, especially some of that more orchestral stuff – 'sinister romance' is the best way to put it. Truth be told, that Can track is from 1972 so we're cheating a little bit. Whatever those lyrics are going on about, I have no idea, but they do seem to feed the story. There are so many song references in the book – Pynchon seemed to have more references to bubblegum pop, like 'Sugar Sugar' by the Archies, that didn't make the movie. I didn't want to just do a 'Best of 1970'.

i *Inherent Vice* is released in UK cinemas on 30 January and is reviewed on page 74



The Man: Josh Brolin as cop 'Bigfoot' Bjornsen

SLAVE TO THE RHYTHM

'Whiplash' is a film about the struggles of a young would-be jazz drummer that took Sundance, and then Cannes, by storm. Nick James takes five perspectives on the film and, overleaf, talks to its fresh-faced director Damien Chazelle

1 People make remarks about how young Damien Chazelle looks for a director who's already made two features. At the interview hotel, he stepped out of the bathroom – where he was being made up for our photographer – looking, as you can see overleaf, the epitome of newbie promise: check shirt, messy curls and puppyish face. If I were his film's cruel elder character, Fletcher (the experienced jazz orchestra teacher played by J.K. Simmons), I might have slapped him.

2 At Cannes this year, at the urging of critic Amy Taubin, I made sure to see *Whiplash* in Directors' Fortnight. Until then, lengthy epics like *Winter Sleep* and *Leviathan* had dominated the festival. I'd ingested a great deal of substantial contemplative long-chew sustenance, and what was needed was a film that could take my head off. *Whiplash* was that film. But it turns out that there is some irony about what I say about the lengthy epics, given Chazelle's own heavyweight cinematic influences, which he explains overleaf.

THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOY
In *Whiplash*, Miles Teller plays Andrew (pictured), whose brutal practice regime expresses director Damien Chazelle's belief that the first step to becoming an artist in any field is to commit to endless hours of hard work and practice

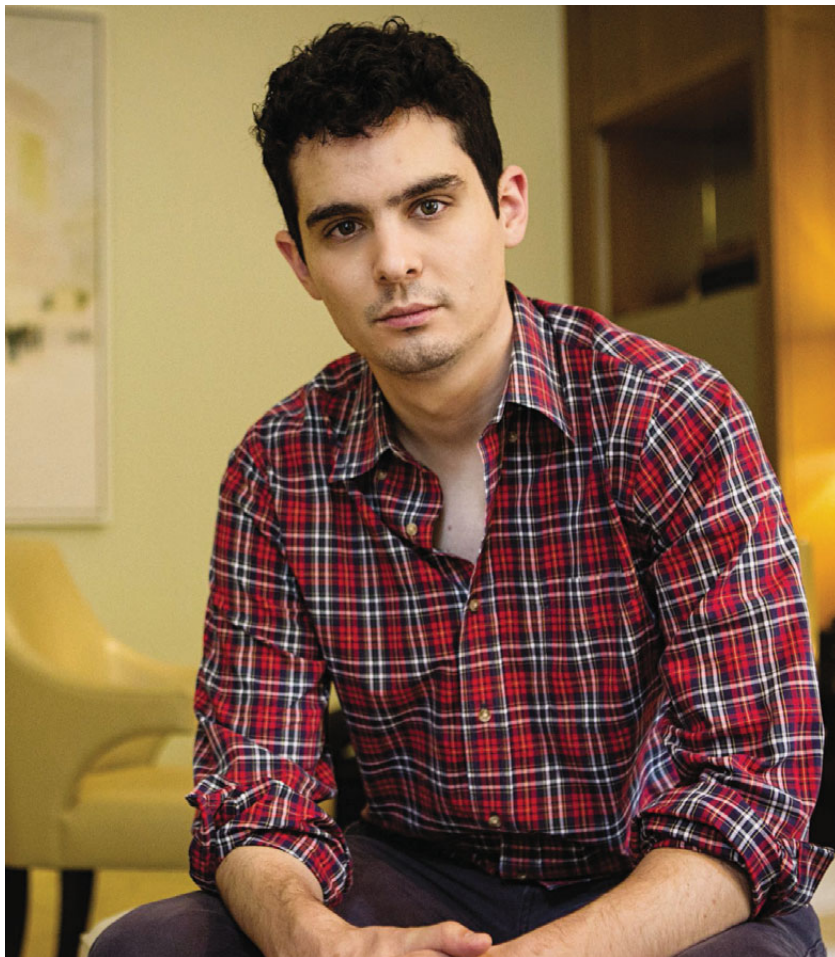


3 You can't make a film about a drummer, right, because drumming is often dull. And you can't make a popular film about jazz either, because some jazz takes time to listen to properly and is patrolled by snobs. Yes? Wrong. *Whiplash* centres on Andrew (Miles Teller), a young man trying to get good enough to play the drums for the top ensemble of a Juilliard-like school. It's a visceral physical and psychological struggle between a kid who won't give up and the most driven, sadistic teacher imaginable. When *Whiplash* is about jazz, it's about accessible orchestral compositions, but most of the time it's about using the drums to build suspense and tension and as an expression of frustration and physical failure.

4 The key dispute in *Whiplash*, between Fletcher, the perfectionist, and Andrew, the naive, keen kid who thinks Buddy Rich is the acme of jazz drumming and wants to emulate him, goes right to core of the drummer problem. "That's not my tempo," Fletcher shouts into his face. "Were you rushing or were you dragging?" Everyone who has played in a band has seen those kinds of confrontations (Chazelle himself was a drummer and the film is based on direct personal experience). Drummers aren't metronomes and weak ones do either drag time or, more often, speed up. It's a heresy to say it, but that's why programmable drum machines were greeted by rock and pop musicians with such alacrity when they became widely available in the 1980s. They might sound inhuman but they keep time. Good drummers are hard to find.

5 Chazelle has said that he opens the film with Andrew practising and doing rolls on the snare drum because the sound of a snare drum indicates that a war is about to start. What this film is very good at is using the tools of cinema suspense with utmost precision, in a way as sonic and visual weapons. It's the kind of film that keeps you hyper-aware in your seat because you're with the young man and at any minute a cymbal might come flying at your head.





Nick James: You made a short version of *Whiplash* first to attract interest and finance, based on a scene from the feature screenplay. Which scene was it?

Damien Chazelle: It was the first studio band rehearsal scene – Andrew’s first day in the studio. It’s a 17-minute chunk.

NJ: How did making the short affect your thought processes in putting the feature together?

DC: The script was the most personal thing I’d ever written. I wrote it quickly and everyone said no. Then I finally got it into the hands of some people [Helen Estabrook, Couper Samuelson, Jason Reitman and Jason Blum] who said, “OK, let’s do something that’ll get you noticed.” And so we did the short. At first I was just bummed, irritated – I just wanted to do the feature. I felt that it meant I had to prove myself with the short, and the arrogant side of me didn’t want to have to do that. It felt like a test.

NJ: An audition.

DC: Exactly. But actors have to go through that, so it was only fair. It also helped because in some ways the short is very different. The look of it is white walls and big open windows... more clinical. The place we shot it in looks a bit like a mental asylum. It gave it the *Full Metal Jacket* feel that was there in the script and reflected what my band room looked like. But it didn’t seem like the right look. I wanted to make it live much more in a Gordon Willis/*Godfather* world of browns, yellows and golds – blue when you ventured outside, but the heart of the movie was going to live in this golden-slash-amber-hued look. It was a big lookbook of Caravaggio, Goya, Velázquez and

I knew this needed to be a fast movie. It needed to feel like a drum solo. It needed to build and have a real sense of momentum

Rembrandt paintings, some Edward Hopper, and James Gray movies like *The Yards*, Harris Savides’s work on *Birth* – that whole spectrum.

NJ: So the script you had before the short was made was the one you eventually shot? There wasn’t any further development?

DC: Not really. I made a few tweaks. It got a little tighter, but in general it was the script that was already there. The short was more of a service, not just financially, but also in terms of figuring out how to translate the full script to the screen. I worked with J.K. [Simmons] on the short, which helped seal the deal that it had to be him as Fletcher.

NJ: What’s surprising – apart from the fact that you managed to raise money to make a film about a drummer – is that the film has got a terrific sense of sustained suspense and tension. So apart from the narrative drive, the other thing that must have been really crucial is the use of sound.

DC: I wanted the movie to live in close-ups, so the soundscape had to reflect that proximity. We were really going to hear the bits and pieces of saxophones being put together, cases opening, sheet music being fluttered around, the drums being tuned. That means not just that they’re loud but also isolated at certain key moments. I stole a lot of it from Scorsese and Aronofsky. There’s a rhythm to lots of quick close-ups that each have their own sound. I find it very energising: it’s anxiety-producing and strangely pleasurable and maybe, most crucially, very percussive. It’s really not that different to the stuff you do as a drummer, because you’re dealing purely with rhythm. Getting the sound on set was probably not that different from a normal movie, but then in post it became a matter of really fine-tuning it...

NJ: Finding your tempo.

DC: Basically, yeah: the editor working with the music editor and the music editor working with the composer, the sound mixers working with everyone else. The team slowly grew as we got further into post.

NJ: So did this concern for rhythm also carry into your work with the actors?

DC: One thing I learned from the short is about stuff not taking too long. The first cut of the short felt really dead: long and fat. We did a lot of editing to suck out as much air as possible and we wound up succeeding, but [on the feature] I tried to learn from that mistake and think very consciously and proactively about line delivery and the tempo of camera moves. I probably watch too many rigorous art movies. My natural tendency is to hold a camera to someone’s face for half an hour to see what would happen.

NJ: That tension between speed and contemplation is there in the film.

DC: I guess that’s the thing. There certainly are moments in the movie where we just look at Miles for a while, but the initial cut of the movie was almost three hours long.

NJ: We look forward to the director’s cut.

DC: No, you don’t. It was a very different movie. It wasn’t intentional, it was just my natural tendency. In terms of the subject matter and the emotion I wanted it to convey I knew this needed to be a fast movie. It needed to feel like a drum solo. It needed to build and have a real sense of momentum. Yet even with all that pre-thinking I wound up at the outset [of post] with a slow European art movie.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FABRIZIO MATESE

NJ: It doesn't feel like that at all. It's such an energised film.

DC: It's the editing. If I had to boil the process down to one thing, it would just be tightening. There wasn't that much structural overhaul. It was really just a matter of saying, "OK, we have a two-hour-45-minute movie, and we need to cut an hour." It becomes an intellectual challenge. A couple of lengthy scenes we cut right away gained us maybe ten minutes. Otherwise every scene was left intact. It's amazing how much tighter you can make a movie without cutting scenes.

NJ: Your film has been showered with praise ever since Sundance. But there have been complaints about the nature of the jazz you depict, of it being insufficiently about improvisation.

DC: Everyone has different experiences of jazz. I lived and breathed and bled jazz for four years of my life, so I stand by the depiction of the music. To my mind my first movie [*Guy and Madeline on a Park Bench*, 2009] was about a lot of the things that the people you mention [the complainers] wish this movie was about: improvisation, small combo playing, musicians getting together and just searching ideas, and jamming. The whole movie was about a very pleasant community of jazz musicians who really love the music and are daily going about playing it, working on it and soaking it up. So I'd already done that. I wanted to purposefully hone in on a very different side to music, which is more worthwhile to document because everything else feeds into stuff we already know about jazz. I do take an objection to this idea that, say, Charlie Parker was born Charlie Parker, or Tony Williams was born Tony Williams. The word prodigy itself is a misnomer, because you actually look and you find that Mozart's father happened to be the most important music teacher in the world at that moment, and Mozart happened to live in Salzburg and by the time he was four he'd spent more time at the piano than anyone in their thirties.

NJ: So you subscribe to the 10,000 hours idea?

DC: This movie is not about the world of ideas. That solo you see at the end of the movie – it's not breaking new ground in terms of a language – which is different from, say, Charlie Parker's greatest solos. For me, this movie is about that first part of becoming a musician, which is gaining technique. One of the most interesting Charlie Parker stories is how he got to be so fast on the sax. I do not mean to say that all of artistry can be boiled down to speed, perfection and raw physical attributes, but he practised for most of his adolescence on a very shitty beat-down junk saxophone that was all he could afford, that had broken keys, and broken valves and stuff scotched together with tape, very squeaky and rusty. So he'd be practising scales on a saxophone like that and when he finally got enough money to buy an actual saxophone, he was moving faster than anyone else. So it's that raw, physical hours of practice side of technique building which is the prerequisite to being able to then improvise, to become a true artist, that I wanted to focus on, precisely because I don't think enough music movies focus on that. There's a sense that music, or art in general, is just this kind of ethereal thing – that you wake up in the morning and you're a genius. Beethoven wakes up and composes the Third Symphony. He was born like that. No. He practised, and that's a big part of it that's weirdly underappreciated in today's culture.

NJ: Are you going to find yourself regretting not being a drummer, or would you have regretted not being a filmmaker even more?

DC: I never regret not being a drummer. I never wanted to be a professional drummer. Even though I was so obsessive with it for so long, I knew in the back of my head that it was always temporary. That's not to say that the idea of pursuing it professionally didn't occasionally come to mind. When you're doing something that much and that intensively it naturally comes to mind, but I knew that film was always my first love.

NJ: Who are the filmmakers who matter to you?

DC: The important thing with *Whiplash* is that it is a very subjective movie. It's about how you use the language of film to really get inside someone's head. I'm influenced by people like Kieslowski and Audiard who try to see what it's truly like to live in the crevices of someone's head. What's particular about both those filmmakers is that they like to live in close-ups. Whether it's Romain Duris or Juliette Binoche or Irène Jacob, you think about their faces dominating the frame, the camera almost uncomfortably close. And there are close-ups of what they're seeing: a coffee cup, sheet music. As opposed to my first movie, where I really was ripping off Jean Rouch, Rivette, Rohmer, Godard, Jacques Demy and Mike Leigh, this one is an American movie.

NJ: So what's next?

DC: I'm prepping the next movie, which is also about a jazz musician. It will complete my jazz trilogy. Then I'll have to do something non-musical. But this one's a more full-fledged musical with song and dance, Fred and Ginger style, with similar ethereal questions of originality versus traditionalism and nostalgia versus moving an artform forward. This one is not about practice or technique. It's about a fully formed musician trying to decide what kind of artist they want to be. ☺

i *Whiplash* is released in UK cinemas on 16 January and is reviewed on page 91

INTOLERABLE CRUELTY

J.K. Simmons plays a sadistic jazz orchestra teacher (below) in *Whiplash*, directed by Damien Chazelle (left), who based his film on direct personal experience of learning the drums



THE DOUBLE LIFE OF ERIC ROHMER

The pseudonym adopted by the intensely private family man Maurice Henri Joseph Schérer was more than simply a name – it was a way to help him compartmentalise the very different sides of his life, an enigmatic duality he explored in semi-autobiographical fashion in his films

By Geoff Andrew

'Le mensonge est très intéressant pour l'intrigue...'

(*'Lies make a story more interesting'*)

Eric Rohmer, 1920-2010

We may feel we know Eric Rohmer. After all, in terms of content and style his filmography is one of the most distinctive in cinema; as with Ozu, Bergman or Rohmer's erstwhile collaborator, *nouvelle vague* colleague and long-term friend Jean-Luc Godard, most of his films are easily and immediately recognisable as his. From the apparently atypical *Le Signe du lion* (1959) to the very different and seemingly eccentric *The Romance of Astrea and Celadon* (2007), his films are actually remarkably consistent. Focused less on physical action (the prime concern of most cinematic fiction) than on the intellectual, emotional and instinctual activity that drives everyday human behaviour, they repeatedly revisit a specific range of situations and dilemmas, exploring discrepancies between thought and word, decision and deed. A Rohmer film belongs to no genre – except, perhaps, one that can only be called “un film d'Eric Rohmer”.

The characteristics of that genre will be clear to anyone even slightly familiar with his work. Since his subject was usually the uncertainty and indecision that almost inevitably accompany the pursuit of happiness, his dramatis personae are mostly young, somewhere between their mid-teens and mid-30s. Depicting a formative period of emotional, intellectual, sexual and social curiosity, his *contes* tend to involve people meeting other people for the first time and testing, in various ways, their suitability as prospective partners. In the first of his three great series of films – ‘Six Moral Tales’ – the male protagonist, usually attached to some degree to one woman, is distracted by an encounter with another. Elsewhere, the lead character (usually, but not always, single) is either unsure whether to commit to someone or keen to win over someone who is herself/himself unsure. In still other films – notably *The Lady and the Duke* (2001) and *Triple Agent* (2004), Rohmer's darkest by far, since they're

set in troubled times – the characters are uncertain how far they should trust friends and partners. Despite these minor structural differences, the films all centre, to a degree rare in cinema, on talk: talk as a way of presenting a plausible, attractive version of oneself to the world; talk as a means of discovering things about the people one meets; talk as a tool one uses to try to distinguish some kind of ‘truth’ from hearsay, opinion or falsehood. In other words, the films are partly about secrets and lies.

From this, other traits in Rohmer's work follow. Because his characters need time and a place to meet and interact with others, meals, cafés, parties, walks and holidays are common. If a potential partner is being weighed up, there may be discussion of love, beauty, relationships and what matters most in life. And since Rohmer was not only well versed in the arts and philosophy but liked and respected his characters, the talk is generally articulate, allusive and relevant to the narrative. Thanks to his flair for dialogue, his warm wit and his dramaturgical expertise, he steadily won over a sizeable, unusually loyal audience for what was a rather rarified and idiosyncratic form of chamber cinema (or *Kammerspiel*, to use a German generic term). It helped that his peculiar consistency didn't preclude variety. Besides the three series (which also comprised the ‘Comedies and Proverbs’ and ‘Tales of the Four Seasons’), he made literary adaptations, historical dramas, episodic compilations (unusually low-budget even by his modest standards), a comedy inspired by contemporary French politics, shorts and documentaries, including many inventive essays and illuminating interviews made for educational television in the 1960s. Rohmer enjoyed ranging widely in his work; yet each film – even a TV documentary about the architectural innovations facilitated by concrete – is in some respects identifiable as ‘Rohmeresque’.

But if we've an idea of what that means when applied to his work, what of the man himself? It's well known that he was the oldest of the five critics-turned-directors who'd made their names as fervent

A PRIVATE AFFAIR

It was not until Eric Rohmer (right) died that his wife and sons were finally introduced to his producer and closest associate for nearly 25 years, Françoise Etchegaray, along with his numerous other cinematic collaborators. (Photograph by François Marie-Banier)

ERIC ROHMER, GRANVILLE, AUGUST 1986. PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANÇOIS MARIE-BANIER



so-called Hitchcocko-Hawksiens and advocates of the *politique des auteurs* before becoming the leading lights of the *nouvelle vague*. Some may also know that he co-wrote, with Claude Chabrol, the first serious extended study of the films of Alfred Hitchcock and that he was, for some years, editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du cinéma*. Fewer, perhaps, are aware that he was born Maurice Henri Joseph Schérer in Tulle in March 1920, and that Eric Rohmer was a pseudonym he first used in the 1950s. At the first of four interviews I had with him over the years, I asked why he'd adopted this name. Because, he explained, he'd had to conceal the fact that he worked in film from his mother, a *bourgeoise* who would've been deeply disappointed, even shocked, by his involvement in cinema. Indeed, he'd let her believe he was a teacher of classics until her death in 1970, by which time he was one of France's most successful directors.

Since my own parents had seemed disappointed when I left university to work in a repertory cinema, Rohmer's response seemed understandable. While I knew he disliked being in the public eye (only at our third meeting would he allow me to take his photograph, and even then he asked – very politely – to check and approve the picture), what I couldn't know then was that the small but significant deception towards his mother was just one element in a life given over to mysteriousness and secrecy. Only since his death five years ago has the full extent of his meticulous *mise-en-scène* regarding his own personal narrative been discovered.

THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK

While I knew Eric Rohmer was a pseudonym – perhaps a tribute to Von Stroheim (also a stickler for realism) and Sax Rohmer, both of whom he admired – I was non-plussed that it seemed impossible to establish precisely how old he was; depending on one's source of information, he had several 'real' names, and several dates and places of birth, since he'd allowed, even encouraged, different versions of his origins to be published. These and other minor untruths circulated until his death, after which his family, respecting his wishes, gave his personal archive to L'Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine in Paris. At this point it became clear that Rohmer/Schérer had kept almost everything: nearly 140 boxes contained more than 20,000 individual objects, including diaries, notebooks, letters, scripts, novels, lecture notes, essays, photos, drawings, musical compositions, cinema tickets and so on. Fortunately, the writers and academics Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe were happy to sift through this cornucopia in the hope of clarifying some of the confusion surrounding Schérer's nine decades on earth. The result, published in French last year as *Éric Rohmer: Biographie*, is an exhaustive, revealing life story, which beautifully complements the many Rohmer rarities (TV work, filmed plays, etc) and reminiscences by collaborators included in a French DVD/Blu-ray box-set released at the same time (see my review, 'This charming man', *S&S*, February 2014). Together, they paint a complex picture of a remarkable and remarkably private man.

It is Pascal Gregory – one of the most successful actors discovered or helped by Rohmer over the years – who reveals in a filmed tribute how surprised and moved he was when the director showed him a photo of one of his two sons, to whom, he claimed, Gregory bore a

resemblance. What surprised the star was not the resemblance but the unprecedented disclosure. Not only had Schérer taken a pseudonym for his work in film, but he'd kept his real family completely apart from his other 'family': those with whom he'd worked over the years, with whom he'd take afternoon tea in his office, and with whom he'd share lodgings when shooting on location. His wife Thérèse, whom he met in 1956 and married a year later, and his sons Denis and Laurent appear never to have met his actors, technicians or the staff at Les Films du Losange, the company he set up with Barbet Schroeder in 1962 in order to produce and maintain creative control over his films. Only when he was taken into hospital days before his death did the Schériers and Françoise Etchegaray, his producer and closest associate for nearly 25 years, finally meet. The funeral, for all its typical modesty and privacy, merely emphasised the duality of his existence. It took place at a church he and Thérèse had long attended, close to the family home in the 5th *arrondissement*, but for the few members of Rohmer's extended 'film family' allowed to attend, the location may have signified something quite different, since another great Frenchman had been buried there: Blaise Pascal, subject of one of the TV documentaries and the inspiration for the premise (and setting) of *Ma nuit chez Maud* (1969).

This partly secret existence was led not, it seems, to conceal scandal (though Wikipedia's entry on Rohmer does have an apocryphal note about an illegitimate daughter born to a Danish woman), but to keep his domestic life quiet, comfortable and, by his own admission, "very ordinary". The 'double life' carries over into many aspects of the Schérer/Rohmer story, however. His lifelong religious beliefs, for example: he kept very quiet about being a practising Catholic, yet look closely and there's evidence of his faith in his films, not in any moralising (his work is notable for its tolerant curiosity and desire to understand why people behave as they do), but in their concern with fate, free will and chance, and the possibility of 'miracles' in everyday life (as in *The Green Ray*, 1986, and *A Winter's Tale*, 1991). On a lighter note, we have his penchant for pseudonyms (in 1946 he published a first novel, *Elisabeth*, as Gilbert Cordier, and as late as 1994, when applying for a permit to shoot *Rendezvous in Paris* on the streets of the city, he claimed to be a Québécois documentarist by the name of Lazare Garcin), and his mischievous taste for disguise, especially absurdly unconvincing facial hair.

Rohmer's taste for secrecy seems linked in part to his family, and not only because of his mother's distaste for cinema. He's often characterised as an unusually erudite filmmaker, yet he himself felt that he was the intellectual inferior of his younger brother René, who became a philosopher and university professor. If they were always extremely close, there was a difference between them: while Eric (unlike the devoutly domesticated Maurice) was often regarded as having an eye – by all accounts thoroughly chaste – for young women, René was very openly gay. Ideologically too there was a gulf, as there was with Maurice's son Denis, who writes about politics under the pseudonym René Monzat; whereas both brother and son could be described as leftist and radical, Maurice tended towards conservatism, with one friend claiming they shared a nostalgia for the French monarchy. When I interviewed Rohmer about *The Lady and the*

Rohmer had let his mother believe he was a teacher of classics until her death in 1970, by which time he was one of France's most successful directors

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE
Eric Rohmer's career spans more than five decades and 50 films, including (from top) *The Green Ray* (1986), *Ma nuit chez Maud* (1969) and *The Romance of Astrea and Celadon* (2007)



Duke, he denied the film was pro-royalist, arguing simply that he'd meant to show that fanaticism leads to violence and death. Moreover, René Schérer, quoted in de Baecque and Herpe's book, confirms the impression given by the films, especially the gently incisive socio-political satire *L'Arbre, le Maire et la Médiathèque* (1992): "He was neither right-wing nor left-wing. In my opinion, he was first and foremost a fiercely independent anarchist."

That film – relatively unknown but in some ways a key work that reveals Schérer's abiding interests – dealt with ecology, the environment and architecture, which is in turn a reminder that for Rohmer the critic, aesthetic theorist and *metteur-en-scène*, the cinema was an artform defined by and to be valued for its articulation of space, through framing and movement; it's one reason why he held directors as diverse as Murnau and Renoir, Dreyer and Lang, Nicholas Ray and Rossellini – not to mention Hitchcock – in such high regard. As in his politics, so in his artistic thought and practice: the duality persists. Because he mostly made the same sort of film throughout his career, one might see him as creatively conservative; yet all his films, be they 'typical' like the series films or 'oddities' like the extraordinary *Perceval le Gallois* (1978), are in their own quiet way quite radical, wholly unconcerned with fashion, and just as concerned with how film is deployed to represent (or tell lies about) 'reality' as the more conspicuously critical *œuvre* of Godard.

Rohmer, some years older than Rivette, Chabrol, Godard and Truffaut, is often depicted as the last to turn to directing; only recently has it become clear that he not only made a half-hour film (*Journal d'un scélérat*) in 1949 but a feature (*Les Petites Filles modèles*) as early as 1952. Sadly, both are lost; the former starred Paul Gégauff (best known as a regular screenwriter for Chabrol, and of whom more later), while Rivette and Godard were involved in shooting the latter, which was left unfinished when a producer withdrew funding. Had it ever been edited and released, it might have established itself as the first feature of the *nouvelle vague*; as it transpired, Rohmer, unhappy about the experience, never mentioned the film again, effectively erasing it from his filmography.

More than anyone, however, he stayed faithful to the original spirit of the French New Wave: shooting on location and on low budgets, allowing reality – often through sequences that are clearly 'documentary' – to inflect his fictions. If, even more than Hitchcock, he meticulously prepared and oversaw every aspect of his films – including the décor, costume, sound and music – he also loved, like Renoir, to avail himself of the serendipity and freedom facilitated by filming out of doors with actors and crews familiar with his unconventional methods and his somewhat Spartan resources. A phrase he liked to repeat – "*Tout est fortuit sauf le hasard*" (Everything's accidental except chance) – sheds light both on his films' narratives and on his approach to filmmaking itself.

Perhaps what's most surprising, if far from immediately obvious, about Rohmer's cinema is its deeply personal dimension. It may seem unlikely that such a private man – who kept quiet about having been awarded the *Légion d'honneur* and who agreed to let some old friends film an interview with him for the TV series *Cinéastes de notre temps* only on condition that it be screened posthumously – made films that were in part about himself, but it does seem to have been the case.





BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (6)



In certain very specific regards, the link between a Rohmer film and Schérer the man can be quite banal: his abiding love of books read in his early years (*Les Petites Filles modèles* by the Countess of Ségur, *The Green Ray* by Jules Verne, *L'Astrée* by Honoré d'Urfé); his fascination – a product, maybe, of his family's Alsatian roots – with German culture, particularly writers such as Kleist and Goethe (*Die Marquise von O...*, the filmed stage production of *Catherine of Heilbronn*, the echoes of Goethe's *Elective Affinities* in *My Girlfriend's Boyfriend*, 1986); his dislike of cars, traffic and crowds (his *Place de l'Étoile* in the anthology film *Paris vu par...*, 1965); his enduring love of Paris (all the many films set in that city); his ideas about art (the final episode of *Rendezvous in Paris*). That last example also boasts a revealing line when a woman, visiting the studio of a painter who's tried to pick her up, says she's not remotely worried about being in a compromising situation with a strange man, as she's newly married and totally sure of herself. This echoes Rohmer's response to those who asked how he managed to surround himself, during the making of his films and at his afternoon teas, with so many charming young women: no one present was bothered by the situation, he would explain, because both they and he knew that the relationship was wholly chaste, given his oft-proclaimed abiding devotion to his wife Thérèse.

THE LIVES OF OTHERS

When Schérer first met Paul Gégauff in 1947, he was fascinated by the writer, who was in certain respects the opposite of himself: a provocateur and partygoer, arrogant and irresponsible, a successful, unrepentant womaniser. Despite such obvious differences, the pair became close friends, sharing a love of the arts as well as their Alsatian roots. And one can sense Gégauff's influence on and presence in Rohmer's films: in the outgoing friends of the cautious protagonists in films such as *La Carrière de Suzanne* (1963) or *Ma nuit chez Maud*; in the Lotharios encountered by the heroines of *Pauline at the Beach* (1982) or *An Autumn Tale* (1998); or as a kind of fantasy alter ego for the timid protagonists of films such as *Love in the Afternoon* (1972), *A Summer's Tale* (1995) or even *Triple Agent*.

In these last three, especially, the male protagonists flirt with the possibility of living double or multiple lives. The fantasising of the last ends in tragedy, that of the second in futility and farcical comedy. That of the first, however – which includes the famous street parade of Parisian women that is the only actual fantasy sequence in all of Rohmer's work – ends in a confirmation of marital love: the protagonist, suddenly faced with the naked and immediate possibility of infidelity, retreats to the woman he almost betrayed. De Baecque and Herpe deem this closing film in the *Moral Tales* a key work, a kind of autobiographical fantasy and self-critique, in which a stolidly bourgeois family man wonders what it might be like to lead a Gégauff lifestyle but is never, finally, prepared to find out for himself.

Schérer/Rohmer was a man of contradictions. Understandably, he's often been described as rather cerebral, yet he had a lifelong passion for exercise and sport. (He arrived at one of my interviews, when he was in his 80s, after what appeared to have been a brisk walk of several kilometres from his home to the office.) While profoundly interested and moved by music (he even wrote a book

entitled *De Mozart en Beethoven*), he almost never used it non-diegetically in his films – and what he did use, he mostly wrote himself. In making the highly innovative *The Lady and the Duke* with the latest digital technology, he drew on the aesthetics of the silent cinema he'd always loved (notably Griffith's *Orphans of the Storm*) and of magic-lantern shows. And while he was best known for making films about romantic and sexual attraction, he felt deeply uncomfortable shooting the scenes involving female nudity in *Love in the Afternoon* and *A Winter's Tale*. The anonymous (perhaps semi-autobiographical) Catholic engineer in *Ma nuit chez Maud* may argue that “the physical and the moral are inseparable”, but what interested his creator most – and allowed him to feel most ‘himself’ as a filmmaker – was not the act of consummation but the waiting, wondering and debating with oneself that precedes any such act.

And in his own deliberations, at least as an artist, Schérer/Rohmer didn't just ask what it would be like to be a Gégauff; he also tried to imagine what it would be like to see things from the female point of view. Hence all the films about intelligent, independent, questioning and questing women; hence, too, the afternoon teas, at which he'd encourage young people to tell him about their experiences and ideas. It appears that he felt he had ‘a female side’ with which he felt happy; certainly some of his actors believed there was a lot of Rohmer in his characters, which may explain why the women in his films are as plausible as their male counterparts. Bearing this in mind, it's intriguing that in his last film, *The Romance of Astrea and Celadon*, the latter has to ‘become’ – or disguise himself as – a woman in order to attain happiness. For him, in a way, any divisive duality is resolved.

To summarise: Maurice Schérer and Éric Rohmer were one and the same man, yet led separate lives. The people with whom he kept company in each of those lives never knew much about those in the other one, and the outside world knew even less. Schérer made his presence felt through the slightly more visible Rohmer, whose films may constitute a semi-autobiographical study of a fantasised alter ego – or, perhaps, alter egos, male and female. They're about roads taken or not taken, and all the rich, fertile land that lies between.

A final memory. For my first interview with Rohmer, for the release of *The Green Ray*, when I arrived with a friend who was going to translate at the Films du Losange offices, we found the main door ajar. We entered but no one seemed to be around. From where we stood, we could see doors to several rooms; they were closed, so I called out, loudly and quite a few times, to see if anyone was there. No reply. We remained there chatting for about ten minutes, until a young man arrived who evidently worked for the company. After I introduced myself, he opened a door just a few feet away and said something like, “*Eric, le journaliste de Londres est ici.*” Moments later, the great man himself appeared in the doorway, tall, gaunt and smiling, and beckoned us to join him. He'd been there all the time, and had surely heard us calling and conversing, but had chosen to remain unseen and undisturbed a while longer in the warm privacy of his study, with his books and thoughts and secrets. 📍



An Eric Rohmer retrospective runs at BFI Southbank, London, until the end of February. *The Green Ray* is out now in selected UK cinemas

While Rohmer was best known for making films about romantic and sexual attraction, he felt deeply uncomfortable shooting scenes involving female nudity

LABOURS OF LOVE

(Clockwise from top left) *Le Signe du lion* (1959), *La Carrière de Suzanne* (1963), *Claire's Knee* (1970), *The Aviator's Wife* (1981), *Triple Agent* (2004), *A Summer's Tale* (1995), *Die Marquise von O...* (1976), *La Collectionneuse* (1967)



WRESTLING WITH DEMONS

Bennett Miller's 'Foxcatcher', which tells the fateful true-life tale of a disturbed millionaire who takes over the training of a pair of down-on-their-luck Olympic wrestlers, is a troubling examination of the fiercely contested battlegrounds of class and male pride in America **By Sam Davies**

Spoiler alert: this feature reveals a plot twist

In George Hitchcock's 1960 short story, 'An Invitation to the Hunt', an office worker is shocked and unsettled when the local elite request the pleasure of his company at their hunt. He spends an anxious week trying to convince himself and those around him that he is indifferent and may well decline the offer. His colleagues coo enviously over this golden ticket to society's Olympian heights; his wife acquires and lays out the necessary hunting gear. When the day arrives, the awful, inevitable truth dawns with it: our protagonist is hauled from his bed in his underwear by two fully dressed hunters, and whipped across the lawn towards open country – as the fox.

Foxcatcher opens with an extended montage of hunters preparing to ride with the hounds. The black-and-white archival images depict old money, the aristocracy of the American East Coast, enacting a scene that could as easily be situated in the Cotswolds as Chester County and Pennsylvania's gently rolling hills. Shifting to the mid-1980s, *Foxcatcher* tells the true story of a very peculiar kind of hunt. Brothers Mark (Channing Tatum) and Dave Schultz (Mark Ruffalo) are both Olympic wrestling champions, scraping along on the meagre funding available to a niche sport, coaching and doing personal appearances for unimpressed elementary schoolers. John du Pont (Steve Carell), scion of a family that can trace its place at the top table of American history back to the

Revolution, sits on a family fortune made in chemicals, and dreams big. His geriatric mother, Jean, is a breeder of horses; du Pont wants to be a leader of men. He decides to make his family estate, Foxcatcher Farm, home to a squad of wrestlers who will train under his supervision as Team Foxcatcher and bring glory to the United States by returning from the 1988 Seoul Olympics with a haul of gold medals. Identifying the Schultzes as his prize specimens, du Pont sets out to recruit first Mark, and later his older, more pragmatic brother Dave. All three are caught up in a different kind of chase: for approval, for sporting recognition, for financial security. The mutual misunderstanding is toxic from the start, and collapses slowly into paranoia, regret and finally murder.

In person, *Foxcatcher*'s director Bennett Miller is a softly spoken, slightly rumpled figure – possibly a little more softly spoken and rumpled for speaking the morning after *Foxcatcher*'s premiere at the BFI London Film Festival. What was it about the entanglement of the Schultzes and their sport with du Pont's money, power and pathologies, that grabbed Miller? "I just had a glimpse of this wealthy man, one of the wealthiest men in America, and this wrestler, Mark Schultz," he explains. "I had an image of them in a room together, talking, looking at each other, and the sizzle of that transaction – of what each has that the other might want; who each of them was to the other; who each could be in the eyes of the other."

This vision – which is realised in the film in a supremely awkward first encounter, played beautifully by Tatum and Carell – came from reading press clippings about the story, pressed into Miller's hand by a stranger at a DVD signing. "About a month later I was throwing stuff out and I came across it and read the first article and knew 'I'm doing this'. It's never happened to me before, that [feeling of] 'I'm doing this'."

Miller began an exhaustive research process, interviewing Mark Schultz and dozens of friends, associates and eyewitnesses. A documentary approach was never an option though. "It really tickled me in an uncomfortable, weird way, this absurd, comical tragedy. In my mind, I had an image of du Pont walking into the gym with this guy and watching wrestlers wrestle – that's not something you're going to get in talking heads. The film is what happens beneath the surface. Every aspect of the film is attempting to sensitise you to what's *not* being expressed in this world of fragile male egos that have problems with communication, people who really don't express themselves, which is another American theme – and probably not totally foreign to you in the UK either."

Miller's first feature was a documentary, *The Cruise* (1998), about a semi-homeless New York tour guide. After that he made *Capote* (2005), a non-fiction dramatic feature about a novelist eschewing fiction to write a book-length piece of non-fiction, and then *Moneyball* (2011), dramatising the true story of how Billy Beane, general manager of the Oakland Athletics baseball team, tore the sport's received wisdom to shreds. There is a kind of pattern discernible, so I check with Miller that he doesn't have any kind of grudge against the fictional. "Yeah, I hate fiction, fiction's dumb. No, not at all. At some point I'm either going to have to stop saying that it's a coincidence that the films I've made are based on true stories, or..." He pauses, changing tack: "They're not cradle to grave. These films use the language of [dramatic] cinema, not documentaries, they're not simply telling a story – they're about what's happening beneath the surface. It all fits very neatly and comfortably under the umbrella of cinema."



Capote was nominated for best film and best director at the Oscars and Baftas, while Philip Seymour Hoffman in the title role won best actor at both, and the leads in *Foxcatcher* are already being tipped for similar recognition. Tatum's performance as Mark Schultz exhibits an almost painfully naive faith in his social superiors and the narratives of hard work and national pride (which Miller compares to a kind of false consciousness). But he also captures the sheer physical exuberance that comes with having the body of an elite athlete. Shambling across a lawn at one point, fists low to the ground as if rehearsing motion-capture moves for a *Planet of the Apes* film, he executes a series of forward rolls out of pleasure in his own prowess. Carell's performance, from a cynical point of view, ticks more of the boxes that cliché usually calls for in Oscar bait: a comic playing against type, deeply immersed in a straight role, a physical transformation through prosthetics – Carell even stiffens his posture, as if to suggest du Pont's *idée fixe*, the one-track mania of his obsession with Olympic glory by proxy, through his rigid neck and shoulders.

But the role of du Pont is not as much of a departure for Carell as first appears. While Miller is clearly an obsessive when it comes to minutiae and how it can create mood and tone, his direction of actors demands improvisation rather than micro-management. ➡

THIS SPORTING LIFE
Steve Carell plays wealthy heir John du Pont (left), who decides to offer training facilities to Olympic wrestling champions Mark Schultz (played by Channing Tatum, top) and his brother Dave (played by Mark Ruffalo, above) in *Foxcatcher*

“It’s important that actors author their performances. They should be able to speak for their character in any moment,” he says. “And even if there’s a case where the script was the best alternative we had, I’d still want to begin two minutes before the scene with the improvisation of getting up to that.” Ad-libbing has been Carell’s m.o. in much of his comedy work and in one scene Carell the comic unmistakably sneaks out. Du Pont and Mark Schultz are aboard a helicopter, about to attend a black-tie event at which the terrified Schultz must introduce his mentor with a cringeworthy aggrandising blurb that he cannot memorise. Carell as du Pont calmly passes his protégé lines of coke and a straw while burling the words “philanthropist, philatelist, ornithologist” at him over and over, a mnemonic warped into an absurd, delirious tongue-twister.

It’s not only improv that connects du Pont to Carell’s previous work. “The poetry in the film, if there is any, is not really in the language or the words, it’s in the other stuff,” says Miller. “We wanted the messiness and the awkwardness and the pauses. The stumbles and the glitches, that’s all part of it.” Awkwardness has been arguably the defining note of film and TV comedy on both sides of the Atlantic for more than a decade now: from *I’m Alan Partridge* to *Bridesmaids* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* to *Meet the Parents*. When *The Office* transferred from Slough to Scranton, Pennsylvania, Ricky Gervais’s role was taken over by Carell. *Foxcatcher* stands as a negative image of this comedy of embarrassment: while there are moments of black humour, the oppressive weight of the central characters’ delusions, and the grinding pressure of their ambitions, subtracts all lightness from the tone. Miller zeroes in on moments of social discomfort with a forensic clarity. Mark, tumbling off the rails of his training routine into a haze of bourbon and coke, finds himself wrestling with du Pont late at night on the floor of his rec room. At one stage du Pont’s mother, played with majestic patrician loftiness by Vanessa Redgrave, visits the Foxcatcher gym to witness her son training his charges. It’s an agonising charade to watch as his team of wrestlers pretend to be du Pont’s dutiful disciples, learning at his feet; her disdain for the quality of his livestock compared with her own is clear.

Class is one of the motors driving the discomfort in these scenes. And, for an American film, *Foxcatcher* is unusually willing to register the pressures of class in action, from that first montage of jodhpur-clad hunters onwards. Miller is happy to read the Schultzes and du Pont as representative figures. “This question of class and wealth, entitlement and exceptionalism, all these things contribute to the national character of a country,” he says. “The workings of these themes as they existed in this tiny little triangle, this small peculiar story of three guys, can also be seen played out within our national elections: you watch a campaign and see the interaction of different forces, different interests in the country trying to negotiate with each other.”

Miller first began to develop *Foxcatcher* following the success of *Capote*, with George W. Bush in the White House. The sense of du Pont as another fortunate son, to quote John Fogerty, cocooned from life’s sharp edges by privilege, is there throughout the film. The question of class is not spelled out as such, but a sensitivity to its formative pressures suffuses many scenes. It’s there in



The poetry in the film is not really in the language or the words, it’s in the other stuff – the messiness and the awkwardness and the pauses, the stumbles and the glitches

du Pont’s temporary bafflement when he realises at their first meeting that Mark has no idea who he is. It’s there in the way that an interior scene at du Pont’s Foxcatcher estate might open with a close-up of George Washington crossing the Delaware (evoking du Pont’s lineage). Mark and Dave Schultz, are never, as in Hitchcock’s *Invitation to a Hunt*, meant to be the foxes. But nor are they, for du Pont, fellow hunters: Mark is given a log cabin to live in at Foxcatcher, but instructed to stay away from the main house. Instead, it becomes clear, Mark and Dave are roughly on a par with the horses du Pont’s mother breeds: useful, even noble animals. And animals you have raised and trained can always be destroyed if injured, or if they are of no further value.

Visually, *Foxcatcher* tends towards the bleak and wintry, in sharp contrast to the saturating California sunlight and floodlit stadiums of *Moneyball*. Its action takes place in the perpetual half-light of grey skies. Colour is leached from the world, as if to suggest a cinematography of depression. It’s a feeling that goes beyond simply knowing, from the historical record, that du Pont will shoot Dave Schultz before the end of the film. “That feeling is the final reason why this thing was so compelling to make,” says Miller. “So many of us have that feeling, reading the newspaper.” A feeling of pessimism? “Doom, pessimism. Dread. This aversion to really taking stock of a situation, putting the brakes on, saying, ‘Where is this really going? What’s the trajectory that we are on, collectively?’ The movie’s about incremental pressure forwards, towards this thing that we don’t want to admit is happening but can’t deny.” Without brakes, without scrutiny, *Foxcatcher* suggests we risk ending up like du Pont (who died in prison in 2010 while serving his sentence for third-degree murder); or like Mark Schultz as the film leaves him in its final scene, bereft of his paternal older brother, the perverse father figure of du Pont and even his wrestling career, stepping into a caged ring amid dry ice and lasers to compete in a mixed martial arts bout – harking back again to that opening sequence, and rhyming one bloodsport with another. 

A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE
Bennett Miller on set with Vanessa Redgrave (above), who plays the imperious matriarch Jean du Pont in *Foxcatcher*



Foxcatcher is released in UK cinemas

on 9 January and is reviewed on page 71

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MIKE NICHOLS

ON ASSIGNMENT

The director, who died in November aged 83, may not have made films with the distinctive personality of a true auteur, but he joins a formidable list of professional filmmakers alongside Vincente Minnelli and Stephen Frears who are celebrated precisely because of their versatility

By David Thomson

When he died, the *New York Times* ran an immense obituary that started on the front of the paper and covered two full pages inside. It was a prodigious salute and it let one know that the *Times* was not just the national paper of record, but a local rag. Nichols had meant so much in New York – yet his most celebrated film is an acerbic view of Los Angeles.

The screenwriter Aaron Sorkin called him, “The most talented person I have ever known. He was also the kindest. We’ll never see his equal.” He was a director, and a success. He had been nominated at the Oscars four times as best director, and he won once. Eighteen acting nominations came for his films, and two of those won the Oscar. He also had six Tonys for directing plays on Broadway, with three more nominations. Yet, as far as the editors can establish, *Sight & Sound* has never run an article on his career or his place as an artist. It bears thinking about.

That’s curious, because his first two films – *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) and *The Graduate* (1967) – were widely talked about when they appeared and seemed to be full of what one could only call ‘interest’, as in, “Are people now *really* like that?” Andrew Sarris, writing in 1968, resisted the Nichols bandwagon and guessed he was “more a tactician than a strategist [who] won every battle and lost every war because he was incapable of the divine folly of a personal statement”. Decades later that estimate is still current, but when Nichols died the *New York Times* theatre critic Ben Brantley recalled what the bandwagon meant to a young observer: “I always felt a special tickling shiver when I saw him in public, where he seemed to stand and speak with the droll finesse you always hope such idols will possess in real life but seldom do.”

Bonnie and Clyde is often regarded as the big event of 1967, the revolutionary thrust of the new young, but *The Graduate* was more seen, and maybe it had an instinct

that the new young were on their way to becoming plastic replicas of their parents. Perhaps Benjamin Braddock revealed more about America than Clyde Barrow (even if romantics of the late 60s would rather not hear of it). And someone had the tact and the charm to suggest Simon and Garfunkel to sweeten the dismay Benjamin felt and offset the potential disaster area known as Mrs Robinson. You know who that someone was.

The Graduate was adapted from a novel by Charles Webb, and it had a clever, faithful script by Buck Henry. No one knew then that it was the start of a Mike Nichols pattern whereby he adapted some of the most intriguing and provocative plays or novels. That seemed unlikely in 1967 because he was then famous for a double-act he had had with Elaine May, a series of inspired and seemingly impromptu dialogues between neurotic and intellectual voices. And they wrote (or improvised and then rewrote) that stuff from scratch in the late 50s and early 60s. It is the best work Nichols ever did, and it made one anticipate that he was going to be a comic giant (or what we might call a Woody Allen). It didn’t happen.

Elaine Berlin and the man who had been Mikhail Igor Peschkowsky met as students at the University of Chicago (Susan Sontag was there too and she and Nichols were close friends). May saw him acting as the valet in *Miss Julie*. By then she had had a marriage and a child (the actress Jeannie Berlin), and she was regarded as one of the most appealing, witty and intelligent women people had ever met. Nichols and May became an enchanted couple. From Chicago improv, they fashioned their duologues with such edge and skill that they were on Broadway, in cabaret and on records. Nichols’s first award, shared with May, was a Grammy for Best Comedy Performance in 1961. Were they an item too? Well, everyone fell in love with Elaine, it was said, and it’s hard to believe they overlooked that skit among all their others. 

THE KING OF NEW YORK
Mike Nichols, who was born Mikhail Igor Peschkowsky in Berlin, fled the Nazis in 1939, arriving in America at the age of seven, with no English, to join his father who had escaped a few months earlier





Their work can be found, on records and in several videos on YouTube, but you have to stretch your imagination to grasp their impact in 1960. For here were two ultra-intelligent people who had found a formula for riffing on the mishaps of men and women talking together. It's like hearing Miles Davis and Coltrane together – at odds but blessed by the difference – and it is a vein of wry insight that influenced people as diverse as Bob Newhart, Dud and Pete, Harold Pinter and John F. Kennedy. Yes, the president talked to the world sometimes like a creation of Nichols and May. You can see how Sorkin fell in love with these voices: they live on in the heady cross-talk that makes *The Newsroom* the long-form TV show that reminds us of Grant and Hepburn, Lombard and Benny.

As I looked at these video clips, I found one of the best, 'Mother and Son'. He was on the phone in split-screen, with a drab May seeming twice his age and determined to get her son to feel guilty and bad. (In fact, they were the same age – and the sketch is like a routine in an inventive marriage such as Pinter devised in his 1963 TV play *The Lover*, with Alan Badel and Vivien Merchant.) But as I watched the skit, I saw something else: mother and son were so close to Mrs Robinson and Benjamin. In most of their sketches, Nichols was overawed, upstaged and generally creamed by May – he has an unquestioning sense of her superiority while refusing to be intimidated by it.

That leads to the most lasting element in *The Graduate* and maybe its greatest 60s insight – whereas that era was proud of gay liberation, inter-racial romance and sex for its own sake, still the union of markedly different ages was crucial. Anne Bancroft and Dustin Hoffman were only six years apart, but *The Graduate* vibrates with the illicit attraction of a generational gap. Seen again today, *The Graduate* loses steam and bite as Hoffman and Katharine Ross come together. You want to see and hear more of the shattered Mrs Robinson and the way she can destroy Benjamin in their cold passion. It's like the ruinous mother and son deal from the sketch: we have to stay together, in split screen, to be salt for our wounds. It's like

THE HAPPY COUPLE
Some of the best work of Mike Nichols's career remains the comic sketches he performed with Elaine May (right), while he scored an early film success directing Dustin Hoffman and Anne Bancroft in *The Graduate* (1967)

Grant and Russell in *His Girl Friday*: their best chance for love is in being divorced.

I have no idea whether Nichols thought of that as he made *The Graduate*, but once you get the idea in your head it begins to supply the man with theme and character. What are George and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* but an imprisoned couple who have to stay together for their howling double act to continue? All of a sudden, Nichols seems a possible auteur, and coming up in his career you have the rueful and anhedonic *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), the most candid and bleak of his relationship movies, based on an unproduced play by Jules Feiffer, another key figure in the development of duologue culture (his mordant cartoons began to run in 1956).

AFTER THE FALL

Something unexpected happened when the enchanted couple broke up – I say 'broke up' but I have no notion that they separated in acrimony or boredom, though the legend goes that she wanted more improv and that threatened him. He said he was badly depressed after the split. There were reunions; they played George and Martha together on stage in Connecticut in 1980. There is also the AFI Life Achievement award to Nichols that occurred in 2010 where May delivered a seven-and-a-half-minute tribute sufficient to prove her as wit, beguiler and daunting proposition. Of course, between 1963 and 2010, much had happened to distinguish Nichols from May. He had gone on through a steady process of work, work, work, with striking success. He had become such an institution that the AFI seemed laggardly. Meanwhile, May had been intermittent and uncertain enough to sustain every story that she was lacking in confidence (a trait for which she had no justification, but who notices that when neurosis is at hand?). She had done things: as well as a pair of scripts for Mike – *The Birdcage* (1996) and *Primary Colors* (1998) – she wrote and directed the droll *A New Leaf* (1971), *Ishtar* (1987) and that vexed but engrossing study in friendship and betrayal, *Mikey and Nicky* (1976). In its use of improvisation (vast footage was shot) and in May's difficulty in reaching a cut, this last was a production Nichols could not have tolerated.

So, by 2010, May had reason to leave her fans regretting her hiatuses, just as she might have asked, "What fans?" So she appeared at the AFI tribute, by which time she was 78. If you know a 58-year-old as alluring, dangerous and desirable you are very lucky – or not (if you aren't strapped to the mast). She comes on in an odd black dress, a little untidy, and says it is her Life Achievement Award dress – she's had it years and decades. She then proposes to read a page from a letter she once acquired from Mike's place, a letter from Igor's cousin, Albert Einstein. She has the yellow page tucked in her bosom, and in searching for it, she admits she is nervous of pulling the wrong thing out. This is as sexy a screen moment as 2010 offered, but it leads to tenderness as she addresses Nichols like a mother who has given up scolding (because he's such a success). He was there on the night with his fourth wife, the handsome TV anchor/hostess Diane Sawyer, and he is the Mike Nichols known in the business – elegant, dapper, alert, generous, amiable and cool. He and Elaine are maybe 60 feet apart, and Diane is



KOBAL COLLECTION (OPPOSITE PAGE)



So many people in show business testified to the privilege and grace that came from working with Nichols. But was that a mask to conceal the fear he had known?

at his side, but the affection is palpable and I take the clip as part of the *oeuvre* of Nichols and May. You will love it but you will be hurt: “Why haven’t we had more of this Elaine May?”

There’s something else to be said. May calls him ‘Igor’ because that had been his name. Nichols did not play up his remarkable life, but we should take note of it. For the Nichols journey is as spectacular as that of Billy Wilder, and more alarming. Wilder left Berlin and Vienna as an adult. Igor was sent out of Berlin in 1939, with his younger brother, at the age of seven when he spoke no English. His father had made the escape two years earlier; his mother, who was ill and “difficult”, came soon afterwards. The stress of all this is terrifying to imagine. If shock had made the boy’s hair fall out no one could have been surprised. In fact, that had happened when he was four, in reaction to whooping cough vaccine. So the kid was a kind of orphan, thoroughly at sea, looking after an infant, without English, and hairless. The father became a Manhattan doctor and the reunited family lived well. But a school acquaintance, Buck Henry, reported that the teenage Nichols was beyond being an outsider, and he himself said he never had a friend

until he reached the University of Chicago. Billy Wilder became a smart Berliner, a knowing wisecracker and a little cruel. But Nichols would emerge urbane, beautifully spoken, thoroughly American and constantly bewigged in public (and in most private situations too?). Imagine Lubitsch with a witty lady-killer, German born of Russian descent, mastering fluent American, the toast of the town and the most charming of men, but anxious every day about his toupee. Think of Cary Grant in that part, or Anton Walbrook.

It’s not that Nichols buried that story, but who ever saw photos of him bald? And who would know from his work that he had survived such stress? That’s where questions of his merit or artistic nature become so interesting. So many people in show business testified to the privilege and grace that came from working with Nichols. But was that a mask to conceal the fear he had known, and which was not much helped by being the third cousin twice removed of Albert Einstein? If there was an initial Nichols drawn to family antagonism and the threat of loss, he seems to have abandoned it.

Carnal Knowledge is the end of something. *Catch-22* (1970) didn’t work, despite having a Buck



Henry script and Joseph Heller's approval – was the horror and surrealism beyond a tactician? *The Day of the Dolphin* (1973, Henry again) is well-intended but daft, even if dolphins squeak with delight at it. It's mystifying that Nichols took it on after it had been meant for Polanski and then Franklin Schaffner. This is the start to a line of films that were somewhere between foolish and bad: *The Fortune* (1974), *Heartburn* (1986), *Regarding Henry* (1991), *Wolf* (1994). *Working Girl* (1988) was a big success, charade feminism, and it is that rarity for Nichols, an original script (by Kevin Wade), but it now seems tidy fun at best. What does that leave? *Silkwood* (1983) may be his best and most fearful film, the single radical statement, and the bravest thing Nora Ephron ever wrote. *Postcards from the Edge* (1990) gets back to family rivalry and an overbearing mother. The television drama *Wit*, starring Emma Thompson, is one of those films that shine with hard-earned kindness. *Closer* (2004) is contrived but entertaining and (as always with Nichols) very well acted – he didn't do bad performances. *Charlie Wilson's War* (2007) and *Primary Colors* are shrewd on politics and full of likeable, mistake-prone people.

If we are disposed to call Nichols an assignment tactician, without consistent thematic or stylistic character, so be it. He is certainly removed from the unerring confusion in Nicholas Ray's films or the consistent exultation of a Werner Herzog. He is not an auteur, and we are supposed to be respectful of that "divine folly" still. But look around, and be a little more intrigued by the professionals who do what is offered. We are in an age in which television is superior to our entertainment movies, and a series like *Breaking Bad* had as its directors... Michelle MacLaren, Adam Bernstein, Bryan Cranston and many others. *Breaking Bad* is steadily beautiful and challenging storytelling, but one can't tell the director from one episode to another. The show is due to Vince Gilligan (he directed some episodes too), who is its 'creator'. He envisioned the whole thing and held it in his head for years. But I can't believe Mike Nichols ever woke up with a demanding concept in mind that he *had* to do. He seems never to have initiated or pursued a project at the expense of sanity or net worth. On *The Graduate*, it was producer Larry Turman who read the novel, optioned it and asked Nichols if he'd be interested.

Once upon a time, that was how the business perceived its directors. We should recall that people who became heroes in the 60s – even Ford and Hawks – were once valued for being versatile, flexible and so professional they might do anything. No one rivalled Hawks at that, and it is a marvel that he could excel in – and be himself in – so many genres. Few recognised this in his heyday but Hawks was as much Howard as Welles was Orson. It was just that he was so much more successful and so much less ostentatious about it.

A great deal of what a magazine like *Sight & Sound* has done over the years is to select the individualists and the auteurs, and that may mean overlooking the assignment profession, a category that includes Vincente Minnelli (who went from the pretty painter gloss of 1951's *An American in Paris* to the anguish and exhilaration of 1956's *Lust for Life*), George Cukor, David Lean (I don't feel he responded to the inner life of material as much as its impact), Mike Nichols and Stephen Frears.

At 73, Frears is an unquestioned figure on our scene, a



I can't believe Nichols ever woke up with a demanding concept in mind that he had to do. He seems never to have initiated a project at the expense of sanity or net worth

charmer in his own wry feeling that charm is silly. He has made some poor films (though some, like *Mary Reilly* in 1996, are better than he thinks), and he has never given the game away. He has never insisted, "Look! This is who Stephen Frears is. Attention must be paid!" He prefers to be self-deprecating and amused at his own failures. He soldiers on, attached to the need to like scripts and warm to actors. He seems to me an essential – and a good deal better than Mike Nichols. But that's less the point than their inescapable appetite for characters they can like.

There are evident chumps in Nichols and Frears films, but it's not easy to think of villains or hateful people. If Frears has been having trouble getting his Lance Armstrong film "right", that could be because it's so hard to like the demon cyclist. The most endearing quality in Cukor is his generosity: that's the secret to *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) and *Adam's Rib* (1949) – the characters are sometimes wrong, which is virtually the same as Renoir's realisation that everyone has their reasons. For me, *The Graduate* slackens as it dismisses Mrs Robinson, or tries to shelve her as a tragic figure. George and Martha are monsters, but the film can't give up on them. So it really is germane, and not showbiz fluff, when Sorkin notes the abiding and fruitful kindness in Nichols.

Once upon a time, Richard Burton asked himself which of the people he had met had he liked the best. The winners in his game were Noel Coward and Mike Nichols, and this is what he said: "They both have the capacity to change the world when they walk into a room. They are instinctively and without effort and unmaliciously witty. They are both as bland as butter, as brilliant as diamonds and never speak with the forked tongue... They are totally unafraid." I think Nichols had a right to be very afraid, but maybe charm is not letting that show. ☺

LOVE AND WAR
Nichols earned immediate acclaim for his blistering directorial debut, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, which was nominated for 13 Academy Awards

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OIL CITY CONFIDENTIAL

J.C. Chandor's follow-up to 'All Is Lost' might fit the template of the generic gangster picture in its tale of a Colombian ex-pat trying to make it in America, but there's rather more 'Gandhi' and less 'Goodfellas' than you might expect in a movie called 'A Most Violent Year'

By Trevor Johnston

Three films in, and writer-director J.C. Chandor is making a speciality of surprise. He came out of nowhere with *Margin Call* (2011), absolutely nailing the moral quandaries behind the 2008 financial crash, and marshalling laser-precision performances from a distinguished cast topped by Kevin Spacey and Jeremy Irons. All this was remarkable enough from someone without any industry record to speak of, but his follow-up was perhaps even more disarming, moving from the theatrical core of his debut's sharp-tongued debates to the purely cinematic construct of a one-man saga of ocean-going survival in *All Is Lost* (2013). On this occasion he essentially dispensed with backstory and dialogue to create a compelling in-the-moment narrative as septuagenarian lone sailor Robert Redford confronts ill-fortune and mortality in the Indian Ocean.

Nobody saw that coming, so where on earth would Chandor head next? In his latest offering, *A Most Violent Year*, it's the New York suburbs in 1981, for a tense drama about – would you believe it? – heating-oil deliveries.

Unlikely subject matter, to be sure, but the way Chandor sees it, here's an arena in which a key question in American life is played out: whether it's still possible for an ambitious immigrant such as Oscar Isaac's disarmingly sincere Abel Morales to grow a successful business and live the capitalist dream without resorting to the criminality and sharp practices employed by bullying rival operations. A hero who is loath to solve his problems with violence, and instead does his best to maintain the moral high ground – that's certainly unusual in a gangster-movie context. As if to underline the point, Chandor has created his most aesthetically distinct work to date, playing commanding frontal compositions and a somehow desolate fawn-to-yellow colour palette against the doomy undertow of Alex Ebert's baroque-influenced score. Anyone who sees this and reckons that New York City plus moral turpitude equals Sidney Lumet just isn't looking and listening. This is a whole other animal, Kubrickian in its formal confidence, yet wry and quizzical in its outlook, even as it's wholly engaged in the stuff and fibre of everyday lives stretched to breaking point.

When I meet him in London on an awards-season promotional pit stop, Chandor's sporting one of the

'Standard'-branded baseball caps worn by Isaac's hard-pressed drivers in the movie, and proves warm and voluble in person. Quite how voluble I was about to discover, when a fairly functional ice-breaking query about the particular time and setting of the story was met with a full 17 minutes of information overload – all evidence of someone who loves to talk and takes a breath only when he really needs to, but who is also utterly in thrall to the micro-mechanics of social interaction.

"My writing process is a bit like a tumbleweed in those old western towns: it picks things up as it rolls along," explains the 41-year-old, who grew up in New Jersey (like his central character Abel, forever looking across the river to the great Manhattan skyline), the son of a Merrill Lynch trader. "For about the past seven years, I've just been fascinated by the relationship between ambition and mom-and-pop stores. What makes one butcher stay the same family-run single outlet, while the other store down the street expands into a meat-processing plant? What's the quality of life, and what's the definition of happiness for those two different sets of people?"

AN ILLEGAL WAR FOR OIL

"How I came to the oil business was firstly the notion that, especially in the north-east of the US, it's a life-and-death matter – you don't have heating oil in winter, you'll die, simple as that – and, secondly, that as a delivery operation, buying from a wholesaler then selling it on down the street, it was traditionally the sort of business where an immigrant could get in, and I knew I wanted this to be an immigrant story. You bought one truck and you could serve, say, 400 Polish immigrant households in that particular community, but by 1981 the competition had become so intense, those trucks were actually getting hijacked and you can't trace oil once it's been stolen. Look at the statistics and 1981 is actually the spike in the New York crime figures, the most violent year on record."

It's worth remembering at this point that Jeffrey McDonald Chandor actually had a life before he shot his first feature at the age of 37, supporting his family by shooting commercials and dabbling in the New York property market, and perhaps that pragmatism filters into the stories he tells, shaped by a need to know how



WALKING THE LINE
In *A Most Violent Year* Oscar Isaac plays Abel Morales (pictured above with his wife Anna, played by Jessica Chastain; and right with his lawyer, played by Albert Brooks), a businessman determined to build an empire without resorting to the criminality of his rivals



things work – whether it’s the scenario by which New York fund managers destroyed the global economy in *Margin Call*, or the dos and don’ts of keeping a stricken yacht afloat in *All Is Lost*. Now he brings us this clear-eyed deconstruction of what it’s like to try to keep a business going while persons unknown are mounting armed attacks on your employees, the Teamsters are threatening to withdraw labour, and state prosecutors are looming with litigious intent. It’s not merely a fascination with pure process, however; we’re far from the dispassionate Martian impartiality that sometimes seems to be the Coens’ *modus operandi*, since the key for Chandor is a guiding empathy that intuits the connections between his characters’ moral foundations and the actions that follow through from them.

So, for instance, where Jeremy Irons’s CEO is willing to put his own company’s survival ahead of the contagion he’s knowingly about to unload on the financial markets, and Redford contemplates giving



up on life itself when the maritime branch of Murphy's Law conspires against him, here Isaac's Abel seemingly regards the path of non-violence as non-negotiable, even if that makes him a lone figure viewed with scepticism and condescension by pretty much everyone around him. It's easy to see how the trajectory of a Colombian expat making good fits within the generic template of the gangster picture, and a celluloid legacy that starts in the 1930s and includes milestones such as the *Godfather* saga and De Palma's *Scarface*, yet Abel's – and, by extension, Chandor's – baseline position means there's more *Gandhi* and less *Goodfellas* than you might anticipate in a movie called *A Most Violent Year*.

"I guess it goes back to that point where I'd made *Margin Call*. It had been to Sundance, but it wasn't really out yet," Chandor says. "I was broke, I needed a job, so I started getting scripts sent to me. Eighty per cent of them were filled with gratuitous violence. Half of the time it was just grotesque, and maybe 30 per cent there was some justification, but thin at best. I realised I was someone who, storytelling-wise, just wasn't sucked in by the whole escapism of it, and this stuff just wasn't something I was going to do for a job. It's why I ended up making a movie about a guy on a boat, and then this particular tumbleweed kept growing..."

In *A Most Violent Year*, even Abel's wife – brilliantly played by Jessica Chastain as a tough-love, pistol-packing, Brooklynite not-quite-Lady Macbeth whose line-reading of the phrase 'standard industry practices' all but chills the blood – looks at him like everyone else does (the audience included), as if the goody-goody ruse is only a mask acting as temporary cover for some deeper fierce duplicity. Isaac is splendid casting here and delivers a wonderful performance, in part because he's an up-and-coming actor who brings little in the way of expectations with him, making the character tantalisingly unreadable in a way that wouldn't have been the case had Javier Bardem not dropped out earlier in production.

Is the point then to leave us pondering whether the Horatio Alger myth, the quintessence of all things American, is still alive and intact in this post-Watergate milieu, where the ravaged post-industrial landscape of New York hints at a nation and perhaps even a worldview crumbling into crisis?

"That's the movie," says Chandor.

Better to leave the question for the audience then?

"There are enough clues in the movie for people who're really paying attention. I love stories about those five or six moments in your life when you can't stay where you were, and the choices that you make in those situations will define who you are now. The key questions about a guy like Abel define what's important about him. How does he treat his children and his wife? How does he treat civilisation in general? And is he willing to deny certain elements about his career that he finds distasteful in order to hold on to his simplicity of vision?"

In that case, what would be the key questions we should ask about J.C. Chandor?

He responds with a rueful grin, as if he's walked right into it, but is nevertheless ready and willing to take it on: "I suppose it's not just specific to Abel, how you approach your work is a key issue for me too. How much am I as a filmmaker willing to sell out in order to tell my stories? That would help anyone work out who I am."



During my twenties, I watched a pile of movies. I'm not Scorsese, I'm not the sort of cinephile who can call on all these references, but the memory of that time has stood me in good stead

On the evidence to date, that answer would appear to be, "Not much", and *A Most Violent Year*, in stylistic terms too, shows scant evidence of cautiously cleaving to expectations, since the film's Kubrickian aura has little precedent in Chandor's previous output. Time to mention the 'K' word, then...

"There's a lot of stuff in there, it's kinda like some giant salad, maybe even [including] some little horror-movie things with the whole home-invasion thing where Abel is menaced. During my twenties, no one wanted to pay me to do anything, so I just watched a pile of movies. I'm not Scorsese, I'm not the sort of cinephile who can call on all these specific references, but the memory of that time has really stood me in good stead.

"I can see why people mention Lumet because of the whole moral conundrum thing, but, yeah, the whole film's really formally composed in that Kubrickian way. I told my cameraman to imagine each time Abel walked into a room, it was like he was entering a Renaissance painting of his own making. Abel's always looking where he wants to be, he's squaring off, he's thinking about how he wants to be presented. As a director I'm just a slave to the characters I've written, so for myself and the DP [Bradford Young] this was all about these grand Kubrickian tableaux. That's who this guy thinks he is. That's the movie he's living in." 



***A Most Violent Year* is released on 23 January and is reviewed on p77**

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
J.C. Chandor (above) acknowledges critical comparisons to Sidney Lumet in the moral conundrums at the heart of *A Most Violent Year*, and admits that traces of Kubrick can be found in the film's formal compositions

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FREDERICK WISEMAN

For *National Gallery*, the veteran documentary filmmaker spent 12 weeks shooting 170 hours of footage to create an exhaustive portrait of one of the world's top art galleries, investigating the work of everyone from framers and restorers to curators and administrators. Here he explains why the golden rule of filming is always to be aware that the killer moment is likely to happen the second you put down your camera **Interview by David Jenkins**

Frederick Wiseman is often referred to as America's great "chronicler of institutions", although he feels the term is an inadequate shorthand for articulating his cinematic project. From the outset, his documentaries may appear to be dry public information films with colossal runtimes, but they also operate as poetic narrative works concerned with the minutiae of human experience. 'Anthropological studies' would also be too restrictive and academic a term for what Wiseman does, as there's something non-didactic about the way he uses subjects or venues as a conduit through which to explore broader and more profound questions about communication, business, semantics, conflict, art and the fragile physiology of the human body. His debut feature from 1967, *Titicut Follies*, told of the horrors to be found behind the gates of the Bridgewater State Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Massachusetts. Since then he has made close to 40 documentary features, covering all aspects of American and European society, from horse-racing (*Racetrack*, 1985), vivisection (*Primate*, 1975) and commerce (*The Store*, 1983) to poverty (*Welfare*, 1975), education (*High School*, 1968) and even erotic cabaret (*Crazy Horse*, 2011).

David Jenkins: Why did you settle on the National Gallery as the subject for this film?

Frederick Wiseman: The first reason is that it's one of the great museums of the world. Second is that they gave me permission. I wanted to do a museum for a long time. Thirty years ago I tried for the Metropolitan in New York and they wanted to get paid. And I said I didn't do that.

DJ: Why would they want to get paid?

FW: I have no idea. I guess they thought that in order for me to get access, I should have to pay for it. So I put aside the idea of doing a museum. Then the National Gallery came up by chance because I was skiing and there were some friends of mine in the same place. They had a visitor who worked for the National and she'd seen some of my films. She was the head of the education department, and she asked me if I'd like to make a film about the museum. So I said sure.

She arranged for me to meet Nick Penny [the

director of the gallery, who is set to retire later this year], so I talked to him. He watched a couple of my movies, I showed a couple to the staff. It was actually quite simple. He took the view, which I very much respect him for, that it's a public museum, transparent, and what goes on there shouldn't be kept a secret. The only thing I couldn't shoot was personnel meetings, which was quite understandable. Other than that, I had free run of the place. I got a little badge.

DJ: Did you consider documenting any other galleries?

FW: No. I got permission, it's a great gallery. And from my point of view, the fact that it only had paintings – 2,400 of the best in the world – and there was no sculpture or other objects like that, was greatly appealing. Places like the Met, the Louvre or the Prado, they're just too big. With the National, I can at least

persuade myself into thinking that I could get my arms around it, if you'll excuse the metaphor. I felt I could get a sense of the place.

DJ: Are you able to survey a venue or a subject and guess how long the film you're about to make is going to be?

FW: I don't know. I think if I did the Louvre, I'm not sure I could cover it in one movie. It would be a mistake because it'd be too superficial. It's almost a guarantee of superficiality. It would take two, if not three movies to cover. And even then, I don't really know the Louvre, other than as a visitor.

DJ: What about ten one-hour films?

FW: That doesn't interest me at all. The problem with that is that I like to construct what I think to be a dramatic narrative. When you do ten films, you have to create ten dramatic narratives. Otherwise, it becomes a travelogue. I've never tried it so I don't know, but my fear of doing it is that with each film you'd have to re-establish where you were and who the principal players are. If I was going to do it in the style in which I've done all the other films, I'd have to locate a separate dramatic narrative for each of the films. It might be possible, but my feeling is that it's hard enough to find it for one film.

DJ: Is the idea of "principal players" something that occurs to you during shooting?

FW: No. When I'm shooting, I'm merely trying to collect as many – for lack of a better term – 'good' or interesting sequences as I can. I cover as much as I can, all the various activities. There's no time to think of themes or points of view. I collect a lot of material and think about all that later. I don't like to start a film with a preconceived notion of what it's going to be about, as it's then that you miss out on things. If I'm only shooting to support a predetermined thesis, I'm going to miss things. I like the final film to be a response to the shooting of the film. *National Gallery* represents what I learned about the National Gallery after spending 12 weeks there.

DJ: Do you know something will make it to the final film when you're shooting it?

FW: Yeah, sure. I mean the woman at the start of the film who is talking about

ON FREDERICK WISEMAN

'Frederick Wiseman is one of our greatest artists and his entire filmography is a singular, essential dissection of the very structure and concept of the American institution.'

Robert Greene in *Sight & Sound* (2014)

'Welfare is... unexpectedly lyrical. In one scene, a man frustrated by failed attempts to communicate with the bureaucracy, finally stops and says to himself, "I can't get no response," a moment only noticed by Wiseman's camera.'

Lisanne Skyler in *Sight & Sound* (2014)

'Titicut Follies kicked off not only Wiseman's career but the whole genre of revealing the real underbelly of institutions and institutional life. It influenced a generation and is compulsive viewing.'

Robert Greene in *Sight & Sound* (2014)





the religious triptych – it's terrific. But sometimes you say that to yourself and, in the end, you don't use it. In the cold light of dawn in the editing room, sometimes the affection, the feeling you had for the sequence is no longer there. It has to endure. I knew I was going to use that sequence, but it's not always the case.

DJ: This woman is talking specifically about how still images can come to life, which is a very cinematic concept. And, in a way, *National Gallery* feels like your most self-reflexive film – like you're entering a dialogue with yourself.

FW: Yes, I think so. Not everybody sees that. This curator was great, though. She knew how to talk to people. She had a lot of knowledge and knew how to present it in a charming, scholarly but non-pedantic way. To stumble across her... like so much in my films, it's blind chance. It's chance, and then you have to recognise what it is you've got.

DJ: Has that recognition process become easier over the years?

FW: I hope so. But it's something you have to have from the beginning. You have to shoot a lot in order to have choice. In the case of *National Gallery*, it was 170 hours. You go with your instinct. And you have to shoot in one go – you can't stop and start. Inevitably, there's only one rule in this kind of movie: when you stop shooting, that's when the best thing is going to happen. Sometimes you'll be shooting something very boring, but you have to continue and persevere, because it's completely unpredictable the way things are going to go. It's happened to me before and I've learned from experience.

DJ: Did you and your DP John Davey go on a recce?

FW: I went on a one-day recce there. Then we did some tests to figure out what camera to use, then we started shooting. As far as I'm concerned, the shooting is the recce. That way nothing is repeated. All I want to get is a sense of geography and of the daily and weekly routine. If I had gone on that tour and hadn't been shooting, I would've been very unhappy. And I'm sure she does tours a lot, but it's never the same. Yes, it may have been better, but...

DJ: Do you think the presence of a camera may have affected her 'performance'?

FW: I don't think that's the case. It's the old issue as to whether a camera alters behaviour. In my experience, it doesn't. An extreme example to make the case here: I did a movie called *Law and Order* [1969], and there's a sequence in there where the police wanted to make an arrest for prostitution in Kansas City, Missouri. They had to have a price and an act to make it stick. It meant the undercover policemen had to strip down and just about get into bed with the woman before they could arrest her. When he leads her down some steps in the seedy hotel they were in, she knocked him down and fled. He calls the vice-squad car which we were in. The hotel bellboy says she's in the basement. Cops find her there hiding under some old furniture. They drag her out and one of them starts to strangle her. It's dark down there, no sunlight in the room, and it's one of the few times ever that we used an artificial light. Right in front of the camera, he strangles her for 20, 30 seconds. Then he lets her go. She

walks over to another cop and says – referring to the strangler – "He was trying to strangle me." And this other cop replies, "No, you were just imagining it." Then the cop says to her, "Look, just don't fuck with our boys. If you get caught, just come down to the station, we'll fingerprint you, take your picture, you pay your \$50 fine, you'll be back on the street in half an hour." He clearly thought that was an appropriate way to treat a prostitute who had knocked a policeman down. And that's an extreme example of what goes on all the time. People act in ways they think are appropriate to a specific situation they're in. You could argue that, on another day, he would kill her. But I don't think that's the case. He's just introducing her to the cop-prostitute system. Most of us don't realise that other people may not make the same judgements about behaviour as we do. I didn't think it was appropriate.

DJ: There's a sequence at the end of *Domestic Violence* [2001] where the police are called to a disturbance between a man and woman having an argument. You do feel like the man is altering his behaviour for the camera, because he thinks you'd naturally be on his side. But if anything it makes him come across worse.

FW: There's no way of resolving this question definitively. If people don't want their picture taken, they put their hand up to the lens or they walk away. Any of us are good enough actors to suddenly become different.

Another example is in the movie I made with La Comédie-Française [*La Comédie-Française ou l'amour joué*, 1996]. I was afraid of dealing with actors, and this is a situation

The cops drag her out and one of them starts to strangle her. Right in front of the camera, he strangles her for 20, 30 seconds

where the actors run the place. There are a lot of meetings where the actors aren't on stage, but they're dealing with health insurance or whatever. They weren't performing for me, they were just people at a meeting. I'm not sure what the ultimate explanation is.

Also, anyone who's in a profession – mine, yours, lawyer, doctor, car salesman – where you meet a lot of people must have a great bullshit meter. You have a sense when someone you're interviewing is conning you. I have a sense when we're shooting if someone is acting for the camera. If I realise, we stop. If I don't, we just don't use it. Which isn't to say I'm always right. I just think it's such a minuscule problem that it's basically irrelevant.

DJ: Going back to early films like *Titicut Follies*, *Law and Order* and *Hospital* [1970], did you ever find yourself being labelled a journalist?

FW: I found myself being pegged as someone who made exposé movies. I think I'm not. We make a movie in a place like Bridgewater where we made *Titicut Follies*; if you didn't show how horrible it was then you weren't doing your job. The point is always to make as good a movie as you can, and also to have the movie reflect the complexity of the place. The *Follies* is the most obviously exposé-like of my films, because Bridgewater wasn't a very nice place. But if you visited any of the other institutions for the criminally insane in 1966, Bridgewater looked like a three-star hotel – in comparison with, say, the prison for the criminally insane in Mississippi at the time. Which is not in any way to excuse Bridgewater.

On the other hand, I hope the film suggests the complexity of the job of the guards. They were crude, poorly educated, badly paid and they agreed to be at the place eight hours a day. They were dealing with people who had committed some of the most horrific crimes imaginable. I'm talking about the exposé issue more than the journalist issue here, but they are in part the



A work of art: Frederick Wiseman's *National Gallery*



Titicut Follies (1967)

same. It's as important to show people doing good things as it is to show them doing horrible things.

DJ: With that in mind, *Hospital* is a movie that feels like the opposite of *Titicut Follies*.

FW: When I shot that movie, they had 500,000 emergency ward and clinic cases a year. It was the only city hospital serving the area between 42nd Street and 125th Street in New York. That's an enormous area with a very diverse population. The ambulances just kept pulling in, and those doctors worked their asses off. Similarly in *Near Death* [1989], I had great respect for the nurses in that movie. They cared. I described the strangling scene earlier in *Law and Order*, but there are other scenes in the movie where the police are being kind and helpful. When you ride around in police cars for six weeks, you see what people do to each other. It doesn't condone police violence when it exists, but it puts it into a perspective of human violence, of which police violence is a part, but certainly not the only example.

DJ: You've often said you see your films as possessing a literary or novelistic dimension to them. For something like *National Gallery*, do you see them as being inspired by visual art?

FW: I'll give you a general answer first: the issue of comparative forms interests me a lot. What I mean by that is, how you deal with the same question in a novel or a movie or a painting, etc... The general issues are the same: how you deal with the passage of time, characterisation, metaphor, abstraction. One of the subjects of *National Gallery*, for me, is the relationship between painting and film. Not only painting and film, but between painting and poetry, dance, literature. The different ways you can tell a story and the different forms that story can take is one of the subjects of the film.

DJ: When you talk about the inspiration of novels, what specifically are you referring to?

FW: I've been helped most in the issues I have to deal with in trying to make a movie by seeing how writers have dealt with similar issues in another form. At the risk of sounding pretentious, Flaubert's letters to George Sand are among the best things I've ever read about film editing. He's discussing his writing technique, and there's so much overlap with what I do when I'm editing the rushes. It's nice reading someone who's very intelligent and who also thought about these issues. It's just, for lack of a better word, nourishing.

DJ: How much does the real chronology of shooting transfer into a finished film?

FW: Only within a sequence, not between sequences. I don't ever change chronology within



Domestic Violence (2001)

a sequence, even though a sequence may start 30 minutes in, and then cut to something 35 minutes in. But I never start a sequence with something 30 minutes in, then cut to something one minute in.

DJ: Why?

FW: Usually it doesn't work. It's already distorted in that I'm making a selection. The meetings with the executive committee in *Near Death* were typically an hour-and-a-half long, but I'd only shot ten or 11 minutes. It's edited to make you think you're watching a continuous, unbroken dialogue. But that's a fictional aspect of the films. I like to use the word 'fair'. Obviously, it's my definition of the term, but I try not to twist the meaning to suit my own purposes. I edit a sequence so it's a fair representation of my personal understanding of what went on. And I know that process is completely subjective.

DJ: That description sounds quite journalistic.

FW: In journalism, you're not necessarily trying to construct a dramatic narrative. You may or may not, depending on what the assignment is. I am always trying to construct a dramatic narrative.

DJ: There's a heartbreaking, very poetic scene in *Public Housing* [1997] where you observe an old lady slicing cabbage in her kitchen. How do you stumble across stuff like that?

FW: Pure luck. I was following around a plumber,



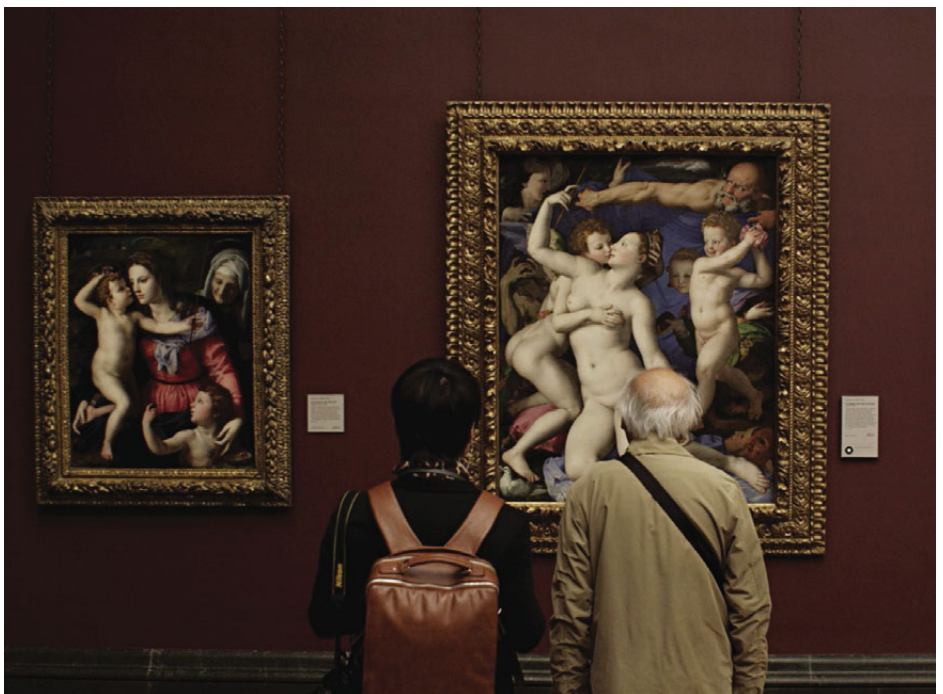
Law and Order (1969)

and he just happened to go into her apartment. And there she was, cutting up cabbage. The plumber went into the bathroom for a while, and I just thought this looked spectacular. I just shot it. We probably should have asked, but I think in that case we didn't. I told her afterwards, though. That [kind of luck] happens a lot, though.

For me, one of the funniest and saddest sequences in any film is in *Welfare*. A couple come in and they want welfare. He's a former welfare worker and she's got health problems. And they refer to each other as husband and wife, then later he says he's not married. It's obvious they're lying. Finding those guys was just chance. I started to follow them purely because the woman was kinda funny looking. I didn't say anything to them until after this sequence. They didn't ask anything, they didn't look at the camera. At the end, when they walked out of frame, I explained it to them and got their permission. It's absolutely amazing to me that you can do it. Whether it's [the result of] some combination of indifference and narcissism. I don't know if there's a general explanation, but time and again, it's the experience I've had when it comes to filming people.

DJ: Why did you call the film *Welfare* and not, say, *Welfare Office*?

FW: I like to think there's a nuance there.



Museum hours: National Gallery



Public Housing (1997)



Welfare (1975)



Meat (1976)

FW: I also like to pick a title that has some resonance. It's a suggestion of what I try to do in the film. When a film works – and not just mine – it has to work in both the literal and metaphorical way. Somehow, in the relationship between these two ideals, the real film can exist. The title is the first indication of that. *National Gallery* is another example. Why didn't I call it 'Gallery'? Well, the film specifically asks, what is a 'national' gallery? It's about the public sphere.

DJ: Do you come up with titles before you start shooting?

FW: Sometimes before, most often afterwards. Usually between the end of the shooting and the beginning of the editing.

DJ: You've said you came up with the title *At Berkeley* [2013] quite early in the process.

FW: I remember thinking about calling it 'University' or 'Berkeley', but I wanted to add the 'At' in order to avoid the suggestion that it was going to be everything about Berkeley. It's impossible, even in a four-hour film. And so, that was my way of saying, "These are some things that happened, but not everything."

DJ: Your profile of Madison Square Garden, *The Garden* [2005], was put on ice because of objections from its owners. Do you think it will ever emerge from its current legal limbo?

FW: I think so, yes. It's getting very close. I've solved my problems with Madison Square Garden, so now it's just a question of getting permission from some of the performers who are in the film. In short, *The Garden* is no longer an issue. I hope it'll be seen in 2015.

DJ: Are you currently working on anything?

FW: Yes, on a ballet. It's based on *Titicut Follies*. I'm going to be working with a choreographer called James Sewell who has his own company. I have no interest in literally translating sequences you see in the movie, but in a ballet you can go way beyond into the world of fantasy, and these are people, one assumes, who would have some of the weirdest fantasies imaginable. You can enter their lives through dance. Also, I want to see if some of the gestures of the mentally ill can be transformed into ballet movements. Ballet is thought of as beautiful, and the movements of mentally ill people can be beautiful and grotesque at the same time.

DJ: In a sense, you already have dance sequences in *Titicut Follies*. The sequence of the nude man pacing and shouting in his cell, for one.

FW: Exactly. That's the first sequence we worked on, because it's already a dance.

DJ: There's a ballet sequence at the end of *National Gallery* which feels like something

that is occurring specifically for the gaze of camera and, by extension, yourself. Or that you have created a composition. Why did you choose not to show anyone else in that scene?

FW: Well there was no one else there. That's not true: the choreographer was there in the corner. That took place because Wayne McGregor had commissioned a ballet based on the paintings of Titian. He wanted the dancers to rehearse in front of the paintings. The reason I didn't show him was because I thought the dance was so lovely.

DJ: It's quite radical that you refuse to inform the viewer, via a cutaway or something, that the dance isn't happening purely for your pleasure.

FW: I do try to foreshadow that sequence, because you see McGregor about 20 minutes earlier, talking with one of the assistant curators about a dance floor and rope. So I tried to plant the little seed there. That

I love spending time looking through typeface catalogues.

I have these enormous books with all different kinds of type

was my way of explaining what it was so I didn't have to interrupt the dance.

DJ: Why place the ballet at the end of the film?

FW: There's a variety of reasons. First of all I thought it was a beautiful sequence. It highlights one of the principal themes of the film, which is comparative forms. So it's meant to suggest that ballet is a form that can be compared to great paintings. The true reason is, I thought it was a dramatic way to end things.

DJ: Finally, I think your films offer a great modern history of the typeface.

FW: You're one of the few people who's ever recognised that. I work very hard trying to find each one.

DJ: My favourite is the one used in your 1976 film *Meat*.

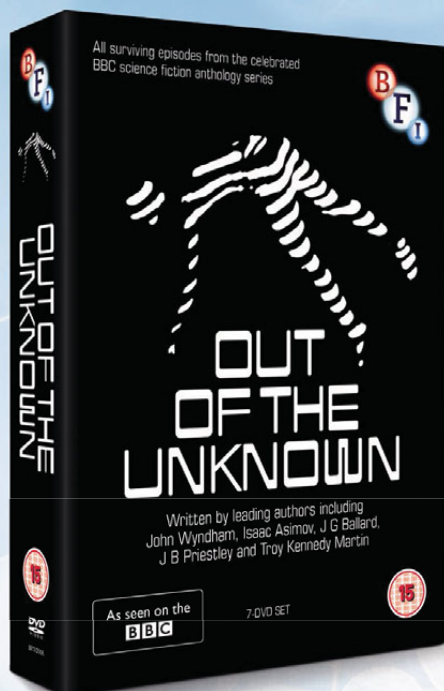
FW: Well yes, I looked for something which would suggest a branding iron for that one. I actually love just spending time looking through typeface catalogues. I've never had any custom-made for the films. They've all existed. Now you can just scan the internet, but I have these enormous books with all different kinds of type. 

i *National Gallery* is released in UK cinemas on 9 January and is reviewed on page 78

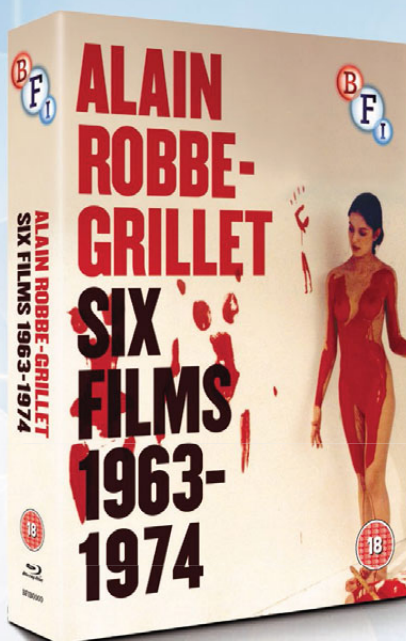


Behind the scenes at the museum: National Gallery

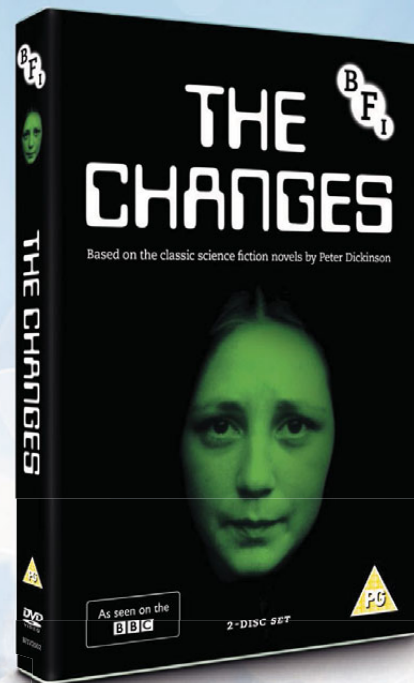
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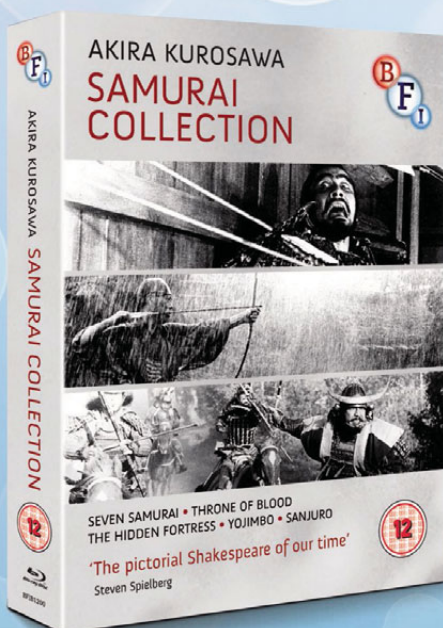
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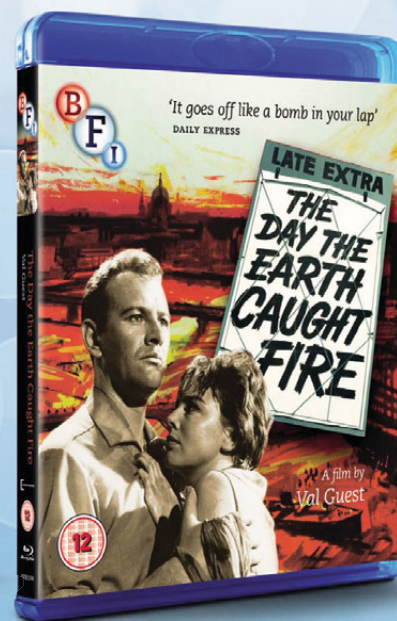
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PROFILE

CHANTAL AKERMAN: A PRIMER

Throughout her career, the director has pursued certain themes and ideas. Here, we offer a guide to some of the most important

By Cristina Álvarez López and Adrian Martin

It's a well-known fact, often rehearsed in interviews, that at the age of 15, Chantal Akerman saw Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965) and decided that her vocation was to be a filmmaker. Today, looking back over the career of this Belgian-born, mainly France-based director, we can happily conclude – and this cannot be said of everyone who makes such statements – that her own work has been worthy of the film that inspired her cinephilia.

Akerman has restlessly explored every variation on her favourite audiovisual forms, from her early

shorts of the late 1960s and immersion in the New York avant-garde scene of the 70s, through bold narrative features such as *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) and *The Meetings of Anna* (1978) that made her a fixture of festivals and film studies programmes around the world, intermittent excursions into documentary, and eventually on to her diversification, since the 90s, into gallery installations that are sometimes ingenious 'reassemblies' of her movies or sketches for imagined projects. Through all this, she has stayed true to certain abiding concerns and underlying drives.

The following Akerman Primer, coinciding with a comprehensive two-year retrospective presented by A Nos Amours at the ICA in London, annotates a few of these recurring forms and themes in her work while trying to respect the fierce tension beneath it: an audiovisual art (across all media) that can be youthful, free, lyrical and

romantic, yet is always transforming itself into an angry, probing, sometimes melancholic reflection on the troubled state of things. And then it finds renewed hope and energy, a reason to go on living and struggling, in that selfsame lyricism...

Portrait(s)

Some of Akerman's earliest works, like *L'Enfant aimé – ou je joue à être une femme mariée* (1971, resurrected more recently in installation form as *In the Mirror*) or *The 15/8* (1973), co-directed by Samy Szlingerbaum (in which a young Finnish woman is caught by the camera in long fixed takes while her voice drones on the soundtrack), are experiments that can be classed in the tradition of the cine-portrait as practised by Andy Warhol and Philippe Garrel, among others. Many of her subsequent films – from *Jeanne Dielman* to the touching *Portrait of a Young Girl at the End of the 60s in Brussels* (1994) – are painstaking studies



Kitchen confidential: Delphine Seyrig in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975)

of women who negotiate their daily lot.

As with many filmmakers, Akerman's work can be taken as autobiographical in nature, and hence a self-portrait. But, across her *oeuvre*, this presentation of self takes multiple, indirect paths. We are left, as spectators, to trace the recurring obsessions and pick up hints of her personality traits – and she herself has sketched out a guide, *Chantal Akerman by Chantal Akerman* (1997). In *The Meetings of Anna*, a director (Aurore Clément) travels to Germany to present her latest film. Along the way, she has various encounters with different people – some planned, some not. The tone of these meetings is often anguished, as if some intangible but impermeable barrier separated her from the world. This leads to relationships with others that can seem dry, barren, even violent – as we see also in her early feature *Je tu il elle* (1974). At other times, the heroine of *Meetings of Anna* appears to take refuge in a limp, passive assent to whatever is surrounding her.

The self-portrait effect is intensified – and complicated – still further when Akerman acts in her own films, such as in *Je tu il elle* and the delightful, too-little-seen *Man with a Suitcase* (1984). In this comedy with absurdist and Chaplinesque touches, Akerman's panic over having to share a living space with an unfamiliar man transforms itself, step by step, into a perverse, morbid obsession with spying and keeping tabs on him. But, as her films often show, desire can be born in the strangest, least rational ways. Akerman's simultaneously awkward and beguiling shot at making a commercial romantic comedy, *A Couch in New York* (1996), starring Juliette Binoche and William Hurt, attests to this: nothing really brings these two souls together except serendipity, coincidence, attraction to the absent traces and tantalising signs of each other's preoccupations.

Desire/trauma

In many of her films, Akerman portrays unconventional sexual relationships, highlighting the complexity of issues relating to gender roles, sexual difference and erotic orientation. (In a 2011 interview, she declared: "What are men and women? For the woman, it has to happen as a fantasy, it's not sex that makes her orgasm; she can be more polymorphous, like a baby. She doesn't need to fetishise her own sex like men do.") While her work can easily be read as a feminist exploration of these themes, there is also a personal, idiosyncratic charge – a polymorphousness – that is too rich to fit into a reductively militant, ideological agenda.

In fact, some of the most poetic and overwhelming moments in her work – like the final scene of *Portrait of a Young Girl*, the encounter with the lover in *The Meetings of Anna*, or most of *Night and Day* (1991), *The Captive* (2000) and *Almayer's Folly* (2011) – take up these concerns in order to chart a desire that forms complex circuits of projection, substitution and transposition between people. Ambiguity reigns when love walks in the door.

Yet if there is one thing that has left an indelible and unambiguous mark on Akerman's work, it is the Holocaust. She comes from a



Chantal Akerman: restless explorer

Jewish-Polish family; her maternal grandparents perished in Auschwitz. Her mother – a crucial figure in her life as well as in her filmography – survived the camps but was deeply affected by the experience. (*Tomorrow We Move*, in 2004, dramatises this, amid the general context of a light comedy.) Akerman carries within herself traces of the trauma suffered by these previous

Much of Akerman's output is based on strict formal decisions about how to shoot and structure what is in front of the camera

generations; her family history has come to shape the style, tone and preoccupations of her cinema, as she testifies in her recent book *Ma mère rit* ('My mother laughs'). The vexed question of Jewish identity in the contemporary world is at the heart of such projects as *Dis-moi* (1980), *American Stories* (1989) and *Là-bas* (2006). The feature-length documentaries *South* (1999) and *From the Other Side* (2002) have no direct relation to Jewish issues, but in these tormented tales of racial lynching and mass immigration it is not hard to detect a deep link to Akerman's perennial themes of Holocaust and diaspora.

In some of her European projects, such as the experimental documentary *From the East* (1993) and *The Meetings of Anna*, this troubled history returns in the form of a ghostly presence. In the former, Akerman travels with her cinematographers (Rémon Fremont and Bernard Delville) to various sites in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. As she has acknowledged, many of the extended tracking shots in the film – exterior spaces populated by long queues of people waiting in the freezing cold – remind her, inescapably, of Holocaust images of Jews in line, waiting to die. In *The Meetings of Anna*, Europe's complicated past intermittently pops up as a topic during the characters' conversations, while the streets, the train stations, the people themselves seem fixed in the landscape of an eternal war.

Minimalism

Much of Akerman's output, across all media, is based on strict, elementary formal decisions about how to shoot and structure what is arranged or observed before the camera. Whether it is the repetition of *In the Mirror*, the fixed shot with a slow zoom of *Moving In* (1992), or the steady, omnipresent, lateral tracking shots that formally unite a documentary like *From the East* with a fiction film such as *The Captive*, the form is always insisted upon, and it builds both



Stanislas Merhar in *The Captive* (2000)

↩ a system for each individual work and an overall ethics of her very frontal gaze. "When you avoid low angles and subjective shots," she has remarked, "you avoid fetishism. When you film frontally, you put two souls face to face equally, you carve out a real place for the viewer."

This systematic, rule-bound, *dispositif* side of some Akerman pieces can, at first glance, seem severe. *La Chambre* (1972), an early short made the day after completing the no-less minimalistic *Hotel Monterey* (1973), is based on a slow pan around the director's own domestic space while she stays in bed – bed being a privileged site for many sorts of experiences and exchanges in her art. At an almost comical highpoint of *La Chambre*, the pan suddenly changes direction – as if the appearance of the auteur within the frame somehow impelled this reversal.

At the age of 24, Akerman made what remains (fairly or not) her canonical masterpiece, *Jeanne Dielman* – 200 minutes to record three days in the life of a Brussels housewife, played with unforgettable precision by Delphine Seyrig. A unique film of surprising maturity, *Jeanne Dielman* is composed exclusively of long takes (each of which charts the spatial and temporal dimensions of small, everyday actions such as cooking and cleaning) in repeated settings: a kind of score that charts the mundane routine presiding over this woman's very ordinary, typical life. All remains unchanged until a series of small but calamitous incidents announce to us that the precarious balance of this life has started to go awry. The camera angles remain the same, in their framing, position and distance, but the substance of the images is now utterly different: some malaise has crept in to destabilise them.

Jeanne Dielman is the greatest film ever made about domestic alienation, but its greatness is *sui generis*. It immediately divided cinema history into periods 'before' and 'after' itself. Many have subsequently tried to build a film of this type but no one has managed to grasp daily human behaviour with the same authenticity, intensity and strange beauty as Akerman does here. And this is because her minimalism is not a mere stylistic cloak draped over a storyline but the beating heart of her film.

The minimalism tag can be a little dry when attributed, over and again, to Akerman; it misses the special, minute kinds of narrative and pictorial tension she creates in her interplay of sounds, images, situations and stories. Above all, the description can short-change the crisp, tangy sensuality of her style. Bodily sensations, the expansions and contractions of time, energies of all sorts, human or non-human – all are palpable in her films and in her multi-screen installation pieces, such as *Women from Antwerp in November* (2008) with its celebration of the joys of smoking, or *Maniac Shadows* (2013).

Day and night

One of the most precious aesthetic experiences that Akerman's cinema offers us is the passage from day to night (and vice versa). In the Chris Markeresque short *Night Falls on Shanghai* (2007), the encroaching night completely transforms a cityscape: neon lights invade the darkness and two buildings that occupy the centre of

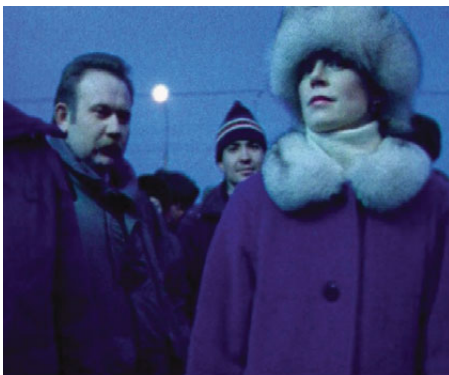


'Two souls face to face': Sylvie Testud and Aurore Clément in *Tomorrow We Move* (2004)

the frame turn into screens trumpeting images of a globalised world. In *All Night Long* (1982), Akerman follows several characters during a summer evening in Brussels. The final sequence of *The Captive* explores all the possibilities of night as something that can be 'painted' on film: two lovers struggle in a sea devoured by inky blackness, and the situation becomes a dance of reflected light on water. *Almayer's Folly* returns to the celebration of night as a realm of mystery, the place where dreams burn ("in the night, he waits for you") and narrative conflicts bring death.

For Akerman, day and night are two separate universes powered by different energy sources.

The entire poetry of *Night and Day* is built upon this idea. During the day, Julie (Guilaine Londez) makes love with her boyfriend, Jack (Thomas Langmann), in an unfurnished Paris apartment. In the evening, while this guy goes to work driving a taxi, Julie wanders about with a book under her arm. She soon meets another man, Joseph (François Négret), and spends time with him at night, while she continues to see her boyfriend during the day. In this film, day and night each accrue distinct locations: the city, with its cafés, lit streets, cars, fountains and hotels, comes to life with the darkness; while, each dawn, Julie races back to her apartment like a troubled Cinderella.



From the East (1993)



All Night Long (1982)

But then, as always in Akerman, there is also the reversal of any classic system of day/night poetic symbolism. In her jaunty but bittersweet musical *Golden Eighties* (1986), we are confined, for most of the time, inside a shopping mall where both day and night are artificially induced and controlled, and no stray window lets in a trace of the world outside; Akerman preserves the shock of the elements – daylight and street noise – for the final, disconcerting tableau just beyond the mall's doors.

Walking

Next to Naruse Mikio, Akerman is the cinema's greatest poet of the act of walking. Her characters perform every possible variation on this action. They march in straight lines and wander in circles. Their humble two-steps can suddenly become performance art, or song-and-dance. Sometimes they are like the celebrated *flâneurs* of big cities who found hidden wonders tucked away in anonymous coves and corners; at other times, they drudge along like automatons, at the bidding of the daily grind. Occasionally they are accompanied by tension, even menace.

Akerman's integral, non-fragmented way of filming these walking figures – whether leading the way, following along on a lateral path or standing stock still as they disappear into the distance or darkness – always stresses the steps made, one by one. Her distinctive walking shots emphasise, equally, the time it takes to traverse even a small distance – because the shortest path can be decisive in films such as *The Captive*.

For Akerman, walking provides a vital physical continuum, an unhurried bridging between realms: her characters literally cross the space that separates the factuality of everyday life from the fantasy and intrigue of fiction. Story is often synonymous with catastrophe in Akerman, cued by an unforeseen glitch in routine (as for Jeanne Dielman) or a high heel that slips on the pavement. So walking provides a safe way back for her characters, an Ariadne's thread connecting them to an ever-delicate state of stability. By means of this stepping in and out, Akerman provides a mirror for our own activity as spectators, negotiating the illusions and lures of narrative.

The two endings

Akerman's most recent fiction feature, *Almayer's Folly*, is loosely adapted from Joseph Conrad's first novel. Moved to the 1950s and focusing on a protagonist (Stanislas Merhar's Almayer)



François Negret and Guilaïne Londez in *Night and Day* (1991)

Next to Naruse, Chantal Akerman is the cinema's greatest poet of walking. Her characters perform every possible variation

who watches his dreams take flight and die in the Malayan jungle, *Almayer's Folly* grows like a river stream hit by a tropical storm. On its surface, the film displays all Akerman's old, familiar rigour and severity: fixed takes, carefully choreographed moves and a narrative of gender division (this time involving a father and daughter) that might well reinforce all our most pessimistic assumptions about the abyss between men and women in the modern world.

But surprisingly, introducing the film at festivals around the world, Akerman described its production as a personal liberation – "I told everyone in the cast and crew, 'Let's breathe, let's live a little!'" And when quizzed by an audience member as to the bleakness of its ending – a long take of the abandoned Almayer slowly receding into himself, a grim, apocalyptic note – Akerman retorted: "Ah, you mean the second ending!" The

first ending, in terms of the strict chronological unfolding of the story, came much earlier – in fact at the very start of the film. There, Almayer's daughter, Nina (Aurora Marion), witnesses what also appears to be a terrible event – the murder of the lover who has whisked her away to a new life. But her reaction is unexpected: Akerman has her approach the camera, look directly into the lens and sing, a *capella*, Mozart's motet *Ave Verum Corpus*. All the violence, murder, death, guilt and remorse of this tale is – for the length of this song – magically dissolved in the offscreen space.

This is a musical moment of the kind often seen in Akerman's career (in 1983's *The Eighties*, she even does the singing herself), in which the liberation of voice and body is frequently accompanied by an ethereal disconnection from the narrative itself, and an implacable drifting away from its conventional code of weighty morality. A utopian moment of release, set against all the disasters of history that weigh upon the memory of individuals. ☹

i A complete Chantal Akerman retrospective continues at the ICA London, organised by A Nos Amours. For details visit www.anosamours.co.uk



Moving In (1992)



Le 15/8 (1973)



Almayer's Folly (2011)

THE ISLE IS FULL OF NOISES

Almost 60 years on, Louis and Bebe Barron's 'electronic tonalities' remain among the strangest music ever created for a Hollywood film

By Geeta Dayal

"What the Musicians' Union will make of this I don't know – but a new Hollywood movie has a score 'played' by no human agency.

"This is MGM's *Forbidden Planet*, a startling science-fiction story conceived on a positively intellectual level. Where customary music credits would appear, the title card reads, 'Electronic tonalities by Bebe and Louis Barron'.

"I've never heard any sounds quite like these..."
Philip K. Scheuer, *Los Angeles Times*, 1956

Forbidden Planet (1956) is a classic of science-fiction cinema, the first Hollywood SF movie conceived on a truly ambitious scale. For audiences attuned to modern blockbusters, its quirky analogue charm may seem dated. But its score – the first fully electronic one for a feature film – still sounds jarring and new. The film's 'electronic tonalities' still sound like the future.

That groundbreaking score, created by Louis and Bebe Barron, a married couple living in New York, was made before the synthesiser era. The Barrons crafted all the sounds using tape machines and an assortment of electrical circuits they had built themselves, inspired by reading up on cybernetics. There were no conventional melodies, no orchestra, no reliance on a token theremin for otherworldly sounds. The music consisted solely of the panoply of electronic noises the Barrons created. To this day, no one has quite matched it.

"I'm still amazed when I listen to what they did," Ben Burtt, the legendary sound designer for *Star Wars*, told me when I visited him at Skywalker Sound in California. "I still can't unravel it all." Several elements of *Star Wars* paid homage, consciously or unconsciously, to *Forbidden Planet*: "The sounds inside the Death Star, all the different rumblings, the tonal things when Ben Kenobi goes in to turn off the tractor beam. That's [inspired by] the Krell power shaft [from *Forbidden Planet*]. I didn't try to imitate it directly, but visually it looks like it, and in some way that idea probably came from *Forbidden Planet*, the idea of this abyss full of energy that goes on forever."

Louis Barron died in 1989, Bebe in 2006; their lives remain, for the most part, a mystery. While many of the famous electronic composers of the 1950s – Karlheinz Stockhausen in Germany, Pierre Schaeffer in France – worked in well-funded institutional studios, the Barrons were like renegade mad scientists, conducting sonic experiments at their small apartment in Greenwich Village.

Their bohemian New York resumé seems an unlikely springboard for Hollywood success: in the early 50s they collaborated with John Cage on his groundbreaking tape collage *Williams Mix*; later, they did audio work for Maya Deren on *The Very Eye of Night* (1958) and other films; and they created scores for



Circuits maximus: Bebe and Louis Barron at work

experimental films by Ian Hugo – Anaïs Nin's first husband – including the dazzling short *Jazz of Lights* (1954), which featured Moondog rambling the colour-saturated streets of Manhattan in his trademark full Viking garb.

The Barrons caught the attention of Dore Schary, head of MGM, by making a beeline for him at an art exhibition in Manhattan hosted by his wife. Charmed, Schary invited them to a meeting in Hollywood. The Barrons set off on a cross-country road trip, armed with tapes. It paid off: after the meeting, they were tasked with making the music for *Forbidden Planet*.

Sadly, the Barrons' Hollywood debut didn't lead to a raft of movie contracts. In fact, they

were blacklisted by MGM, and never scored another Hollywood movie. Their score was labelled 'electronic tonalities' to sidestep a potential lawsuit from the Musicians' Union, which MGM top brass suspected would feel threatened by the alien spectre of 'electronic music'. It was also secretly understood, according to various accounts, that the Barrons' deal with MGM for *Forbidden Planet* was an anomaly, never to be repeated. The Barrons' own bitterness about not receiving proper credit for their sonic contributions at the Academy Awards in 1957 led the couple to try to sue MGM, but they learned the hard way never to sue Hollywood if you wanted to be invited back.



Robots in the skies: poster for *Forbidden Planet* featuring Robby, future star of *Lost in Space*

The Barrons were outsiders in other ways. In 1956, electronic music was the preserve of the avant garde, with a few composers scattered throughout the world and a handful of influential studios, such as GRM in Paris and WDR in Cologne. *Forbidden Planet* offered mainstream audiences their first extended exposure to electronic music.

Many classic science-fiction film scores have been revisited recently, with remakes, orchestral reworkings and homages. Recreating the sounds of *Forbidden Planet* would be a challenge. How the Barrons built their idiosyncratic circuits, treated the sounds and worked with tape machines is mostly a mystery. It seems that each character in *Forbidden Planet* had their own circuit. For the ominous low-end throb of the 'Id' monster, for instance, high-pitched noises produced by a particular circuit were slowed to a low-pitched crawl with a tape machine. As the tape slowed down, haunting new sounds, and a sinister rhythm, emerged.

The Barrons spoke of their circuits cryptically, as if they were living things. "Louis would invent a circuit and put it together," Bebe Barron explained in a 1992 interview with the composer Jane Brockman. "Then we would activate the circuit; it would come to life, and we would amplify it and start to tape it. And it would produce a burst of the most glorious kind of energy and electronic activity. That would level out a little bit – go on along a plateau. And then, in a moment of glory, it died – the electronic explanation would be that it overloaded in some way. But you could hear it climaxing, and the thing then would just give out, and run down to zero."

The song of the circuits lives on in *Forbidden Planet*. Electronic music has become commonplace in the six decades since, but we may never hear 'electronic tonalities' quite like the Barrons' again. 📞

'I'm still amazed when I listen to what they did,' sound designer Ben Burt says. 'I still can't unravel it all.'



Ian Hugo's *Jazz of Light* (1954)

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

How digital technology led to the rediscovery of a missing film, more than a century old



By Oliver Gaycken

The pervasiveness of digital media in contemporary moving-image culture is transforming the way we make connections of all kinds, as a recent rediscovery of the 1903 film *Cheese Mites* shows particularly well. Indeed, the way the film came to light could only have taken place in the last decade. *Cheese Mites* is a landmark of early cinema, one of the first films ever made for general audiences about a scientific topic. It belonged to a series of films called 'The Unseen World', made for the Charles Urban Company by F. Martin Duncan, a pioneer of microcinematography. It was a sensation in its day, capitalising on the creepy fascination of seeing the microscopic creatures that inhabit our food and drink. While researching my book on early popular-science films, I had seen the lone surviving shot from *Cheese Mites* – the microcinematographic view – held in the BFI National Archive. But the original catalogue entry describes the film as having several shots, giving the 'scientific' view through a surrounding narrative in which a professor examines his lunchtime cheese through a magnifying glass before flinging it away.

I am not a film collector; I don't haunt antique shops, participate in ebay auctions, frequent yard sales or do any of the other bread-and-butter activities of people who seek to acquire physical film prints. Instead, I am an early-career film scholar who has spent a fair amount of time in film archives, who is friends with film collectors, and who incorporates aspects of film archiving into his teaching. But I would not have guessed that I would ever find a lost film, let alone a film that figured prominently in my own research.

The story began for me with an email from a friend containing a link to a YouTube video. The friend, a fellow cinema-studies student from the University of Chicago, was putting together a wine-and-cheese screening event at which actual wine and cheese would be accompanied by films on that theme. After searching YouTube using the keyword 'cheese', he came across an old film entitled *What the Professor Saw in the Cheese*. From our time together in graduate school, he knew that I worked on early popular-science films and wondered if I had seen this one before.

I had not.

Watching it on YouTube, I saw a film of approximately two-and-a-half-minutes. In the first shot, a man is seated at a table outdoors. He uses a magnifying glass to read his newspaper and, eventually, he turns his attention to the cheese. At this point, he does a double take and there is a cut to a microcinematographic view of the mites. Surely, I thought, this was a multi-shot version of *Cheese Mites*, a supposition bolstered by recognising F. Martin Duncan himself, playing the leading role. The find was stunning. Of all the missing films in



F. Martin Duncan in *Cheese Mites*

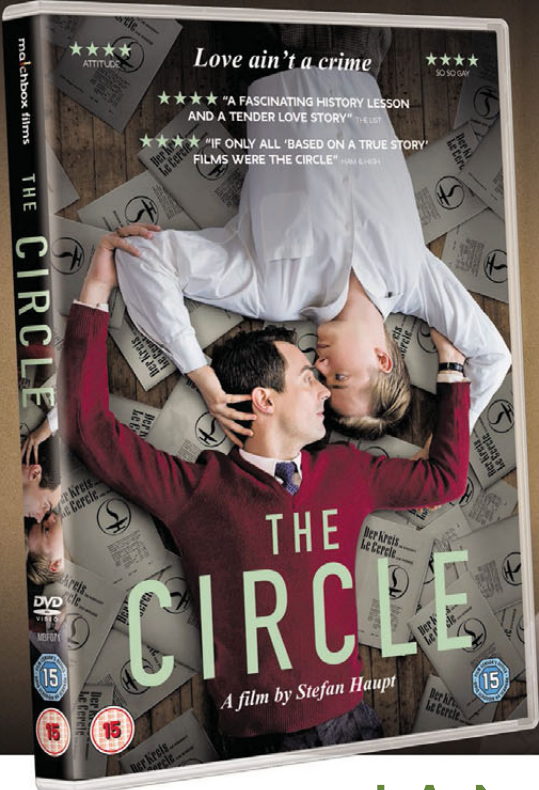
The find was stunning. Of all the missing films in my book project, this one was at the top of the list

my book project that I could have wanted to find, this one was at the top of the list.

Locating the source however, took some detective work. The YouTube page offered scant clues. The user who posted the film, Treksintime, had no other discernible internet presence. But another film on Treksintime's channel contained a company name, Golden Age Publishing, which led me to the state of Virginia's corporate directory, where I finally found a name and telephone number. The owner of the print turned out to be a collector who had bought the film, on a reel with two other films, from a nearby antique shop. During the course of several fascinating conversations, he described how he had digitised the original 35mm nitrate print using the automated advance feature on a filmstrip projector – a widely used A/V device in American classrooms for the better part of the 20th century – to take a digital picture of each frame as it was projected on a small screen. He then stitched together the resulting 2251 images with widely available digital software and posted it on YouTube, an ingenious, if not archivally correct method.

So an odd set of coincidences and communications via the web can throw up material long thought to be irretrievable. The flotsam and jetsam of collections all over the world drift on a wave of weblinks, and occasionally a fortunate surfer stumbles upon a treasure. Very happily, the owner was willing to allow me to purchase the print, and I have now donated it to the BFI for permanent preservation. And perhaps the final shot from this film, in which the professor flings the cheese away, is still out there somewhere, too. If you know about it, please get in touch. 📞

i *Cheese Mites* is available to view on BFI Player. Oliver Gaycken's book *Devices of Curiosity: Early Cinema and Popular Science* will be published in March by Oxford University Press



★★★★★ *Love ain't a crime* ★★★★★
 ATTITUDE SO SO GAY

★★★★★ "A FASCINATING HISTORY LESSON AND A TENDER LOVE STORY" THE LIST
 ★★★★★ "IF ONLY ALL 'BASED ON A TRUE STORY' FILMS WERE THE CIRCLE" HAM & HIGH

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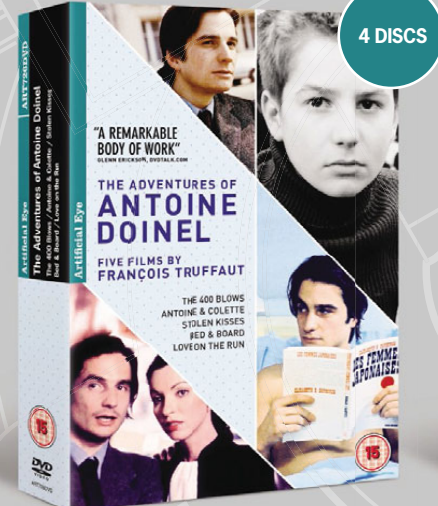
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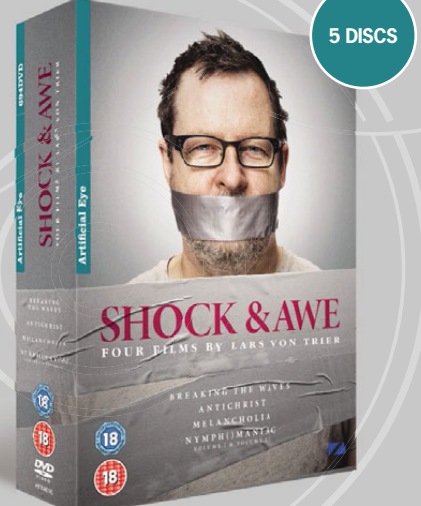


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Reviews



85 **Selma**

A figure too often blandly sanctified, Martin Luther King is complex and alive here, and incarnated wonderfully by David Oyelowo, who gives a resolutely unflashy performance: serene but capable of fear, doubt and even anger



62 Films of the month



68 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books

American Sniper

USA 2014

Director: Clint Eastwood

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If you want to see what a movie looks like when made with clarity and lucidity by someone who knows exactly what it is that they're on about, see Clint Eastwood's *American Sniper*.

Eastwood's 34th feature is adapted from the autobiography of Chris Kyle, a Texas-born Navy SEAL who through four tours of duty in the Iraq War distinguished himself, per the film's tagline, as "the most lethal sniper in American military history". Kyle's memoir was a bestseller, and right now you can find it in the book department of many a US supermarket, right next to the 'Inspirational' section. The title is Kyle's, though for his less-than-inspirational film Eastwood could very well have gone full Theodore Dreiser and called it *An American Tragedy*, because he has made a movie that embodies, with awe and horror, the national romance with firearms. Along with James Gray's *The Immigrant* and Abderrahmane Sissako's *Timbuktu*, it is one of the films I've seen in the past year that most fully exhibits the tragic sense.

American Sniper is a movie that says one thing and shows another, and in this it mirrors its subject. We follow Kyle (Bradley Cooper) between war zone and home front where, periodically through the course of his service in a seemingly endless war, he is reunited with his wife Taya (Sienna Miller) and his young son and daughter, who have grown up mostly without him. While in country, Kyle witnesses – and inflicts – horrors untold. Many people die and die badly, women and children first. Back home he insists that he's all right, that he's not burdened by what he's seen and done, that it's only the people he couldn't save that stick with him. And we might almost believe him, were it not for the story told in Cooper's blue eyes.

As befits a film about a long-distance target shooter, *American Sniper* is focused on vision. It devotes a great deal of attention to the process of lining up a target and deciding to make a shot, and on watching comprehension register after the shot has been taken. When Kyle racks up the first of what will be a reported 160 kills – a woman and a pre-adolescent boy approaching a US convoy with a grenade – we linger as the weight of his action settles over him. The film's final pre-credit images are a simple exchange of glances, between Taya and one of the combat-shaken veterans that Kyle has begun to volunteer time with once he's back home to stay, taking them out on the range to shoot some guns and feel the comfort of the recoil again. The vet is Eddie Ray Routh, the man who accomplished what so many enemy combatants had failed to, and shot down Chris Kyle in cold blood.

When Taya briefly looks at Routh, the whole story of what is about to happen is written in his eyes. A lesser filmmaker would take the opportunity to labour the 'all who draw the sword will die by the sword' irony of Kyle's final moments, but Eastwood, terribly graphic elsewhere, doesn't provide a re-enactment. He allows Kyle the privacy of his death, which precedes a closing-credits coda showing the very public spectacle of his funeral: a procession carrying his body advances along



Shot from both sides: Bradley Cooper as Chris Kyle, 'the most lethal sniper in American military history'

a rainy highway; clusters of mourners hang American flags from overpasses. This is en route to the Dallas Cowboys stadium, where Kyle's catafalque will go on display before a massed crowd. That Kyle was apparently nicknamed 'The Legend' on the battlefield is a convenience that's almost too perfect, for Eastwood, as in recent works such as *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006), *Invictus* (2009), *J. Edgar* (2011) and this year's *Jersey Boys*, is examining the apparatus of myth-making as it applies to real human lives. First you print the legend, then you bury him.

On the face of it, *American Sniper* is the story of a man who, fired by a bedrock belief in 'God, family, country', performed above and beyond the call of duty under duress, and who was taken from his family before his time, when he seemed at long last to be out of harm's way. And it is this. It is also a movie about men and boys and guns – the inexorable pull of them, the romance and power of them, and the inescapable danger that comes from living in proximity to them. Quite early in the film there is a hard cut, followed by a temporal leap, which is startling in its audacity, and incredibly moving in its implications. We are on the rooftop in Fallujah where Kyle is

Before the hangover, there's the spree – few films this side of 'Red River' and 'Winchester '73' are so steeped in the perversities of ammosexuality



Bradley Cooper and Sienna Miller



lining up his first kill. Then, with the sound of a rifle's report, we are in a patch of woods in Texas, some 20 years ago, with Kyle – not much older than the boy he's about to kill – and his father. Everything you need to know is right here: the glow of masculine accomplishment; the very real joyful flush of the hunt (which a doctrinaire anti-gun tract wouldn't dare include for fear of being misunderstood, as *American Sniper* will be misunderstood); the feel for how cultural inculcation transmits gun-love from father to son, one generation to another. Later we'll see Kyle taking his own boy on the same mission. "It's a heck of a thing to stop a beating heart," he'll tell his son, paraphrasing William Munny's statement in Eastwood's *Unforgiven* that "It's a hell of a thing, killing a man."

That first gunshot begins an extended flashback, which takes us through Kyle's entire life up to that crucial moment on the rooftop in Fallujah. The flashback is the story of an indoctrination, a telescoped *Boyhood* in which Mason falls in love with the rifle he gets as a present. Kyle grows up in cowboy country and plays the part accordingly, spending his shiftless twenties riding rodeo under the admiring eyes

of his kid brother Jeff (Keir O'Donnell), before enlisting in Navy SEAL training. Years later, when the brothers reunite on the tarmac of a military airbase, Jeff's eyes have acquired a hollowed-out,

faraway look that we haven't seen the last of.

But before the hangover there's the spree – and you'll find few films this side of *Red River* (1948) and *Winchester '73* (1950) so steeped in the unexamined perversities of amosexuality. Counterpoised with Kyle's polite, deferential courtship of Taya is the macho masochism of boot camp. When the couple-to-be meet cute at a bar, one of his brothers-in-arms is acting as a human dartboard, and for the whole of their life together she'll be competing with bloodsport. The ties between sex and guns are everywhere. Kyle, after getting his first kills, is congratulated on having "popped his cherry". The 1998 bombings of US embassies are ostensibly Kyle's reason for going into the service, though his visit to the recruiter comes shortly after he catches his girlfriend cheating on him. "Damn, if that doesn't feel like I got my balls back!" in the words of a wheelchair-bound veteran he takes out on the shooting range later.

Cooper, who portrays Kyle with a considerable easy charm that gradually withdraws behind a wall of poker-faced denial, plays these casual scenes with combat-scarred vets (presumably non-professionals) with an open, relaxed attentiveness – these moments reinforce the connection between guns and a sense of masculine security without seeming to strain to do so. Another of the film's recurring themes is the enduring prevalence of the western mythos, at home and abroad: arriving in Iraq for the first time, troops are welcomed to the "New Wild West of the Old Middle East". Kyle, on the morning of his death, prowls around his house with an unholstered six-shooter, playing a game of stick-'em-up desperado with his wife, and if you didn't know any better you'd swear from the oddly specific onscreen text ("February 2, 2013"), the looming presence of the gun and how the scene is blocked that a domestic accident is on the way.

This moment is quietly troubling in a way that's difficult to put your finger on, though Eastwood also shows himself more than capable of showstopping, kick-down-the-door virtuosity, as in his film's climactic battle scene, a firefight that's swallowed up by a fierce and blinding sandstorm. This centrepiece reminded me of the siege in Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985) more than anything from a film of recent vintage – if only because *Ran* is another movie by a sometimes-great filmmaker that plays like a mournful summation of a life's work. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Clint Eastwood
Robert Lopez
Andrew Lazar
Bradley Cooper
Peter Morgan
Written by
Jason Hall
Based on the book by
Chris Kyle with Scott
McEwen, Jim DeFelice
**Director of
Photography**
Tom Stern

Edited by
Joel Cox
Gary D. Roach
**Production
Designed by**
James J. Murukami
Charisse Cardenas
**'Taya's Theme'
Written by**
Clint Eastwood
Sound Mixer
Walt Martin
Costumes
Designed by
Deborah Hopper

**Production
Companies**
Warner Bros.
Pictures presents
in association with
Village Roadshow
Pictures, RatPac-
Dune Entertainment
a Mad Chance, 22nd
& Indiana, Malpaso
production
Executive Producers
Tim Moore
Jason Hall
Sherour Kim

Bruce Berman
Steven Mnuchin

Cast
Bradley Cooper
Chris Kyle
Sienna Miller
Taya Renae Kyle
Jake McDorman
Ryan Job, 'Biggles'
Luke Grimes
Marc Lee
Navid Negahban
Sheikh Al-Obodi

Keir O'Donnell
Jeff Kyle
Eric Close
DIA Agent Snead
Sam Jaeger
Navy Seal Lt. Martin
Kevin Lacz
Dauber
**Vincent
Selhorst-Jones**
Eddie Ray Routh,
veteran at truck
**Dolby Digital/
Datasat**

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures
International (UK)

Fallujah, early in the Iraq War. Navy SEAL sniper Chris Kyle prepares to kill his first target. He flashes back to his boyhood in Texas; to shooting his first deer and protecting his little brother Jeff from a bully; to riding rodeo and enlisting in the army; and to courting his wife Taya.

In Iraq, Kyle becomes so lethal a sniper that the insurgent forces put a price on his head, and he enters

into a sort of rivalry with the most effective of the enemy snipers. On visits home, his relationship with Taya is strained. After finally killing the rival sniper and narrowly escaping a firefight, he loses his composure and breaks down. Returning home, he has difficulty readjusting but finds a calling in taking veterans from the VA hospital on trips to the shooting range. In February 2013, one of these veterans, Eddie Ray Routh, shoots and kills him.

Ex Machina

Director: Alex Garland
Certificate 15 108m 0s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Androids – robots with human attributes – have featured in movies in a whole variety of guises, from the Evil Maria in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) through the hulking Gort in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), the loveable Robby the Robot in *Forbidden Planet* (1956), space-butler C-3PO in *Star Wars* (1977) and its sequels, the eponymous Terminator (1984), the cyborg RoboCop (1987), the mutant Iron Man in *Tetsuo* (1989), wistful young orphan David in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), the terminally depressive Marvin in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (2005) and Frank Langella's larcenous pal in *Robot & Frank* (2012) – and we could toss *Frankenstein* (1931 etc), *Blade Runner* (1982) and plenty more into the mix. In all of these, the humour, drama or menace derives from the perceived lacunae between human and android behaviour: they may look like us, but to what extent do they think like we do? And what does it say about us that we've created them?

Ex Machina takes this well-used theme and rejuvenates it by crossing it with another quasi-scientific cinematic legacy: the various screen adaptations of H.G. Wells's 1896 novel *The Island of Doctor Moreau* – first and most effectively filmed as *Island of Lost Souls* (1932) with Charles Laughton. *Ex Machina*'s Nathan (Oscar Isaac), creator and manipulator of androids, is the conceptual descendant of Moreau – an arrogant, control-freak alpha male ruling over his isolated realm, who exploits those around him and experiments on his creatures with no regard for their feelings until finally they turn against him.

Both these strands feed neatly into current paranoid concerns about the potential scope of AI, as expressed in Stephen Hawking's recent warning that computers could soon start to redesign themselves at a rate far outstripping that of human evolution, and that "the development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race". Nothing so new here, of course: back in 1920 Karel Capek examined the possibility of hyper-intelligent machines rising up against their makers in his play *R.U.R.* (which gave us the word 'robot'), and some 60 years ago the SF writer Fredric Brown wrote his 250-word *tour de force* 'Answer', in which the ultimate supercomputer, a "cybernetics machine that would combine all the knowledge of all the galaxies", is ceremonially switched on and asked: "Is there a God?" From a clear blue sky a bolt of lightning strikes down the machine's maker and fuses the switch at 'ON' as the answer comes: "Yes, *now* there is a God."

But with AI seemingly on the verge of equalling, if not surpassing, human capacity in many functions, and with Morten Tyldum's recently released *The Imitation Game* foregrounding Alan Turing and his famous test (intended to probe whether a computer can 'think', or at least convincingly appear to think) in audiences' consciousness, *Ex Machina* is nothing if not timely. The directorial debut of novelist-turned-screenwriter Alex Garland, author of *The Beach* and the screenplays for *28 Days Later...* (2002), *Sunshine* (2007) and *Never Let*

Me Go (2010), the film is a tightly choreographed four-hander. To Nathan's Alaskan hideaway (the breathtaking landscape of Norway's Valldal standing in for Alaska) comes young Caleb Smith (Domhnall Gleeson), a coder at Nathan's search-engine company, who learns that he's tasked with carrying out a Turing test on Nathan's latest creation, Ava (Alicia Vikander). The only other resident is Kyoko (Sonoya Mizuno), Nathan's assistant and bed companion, who never speaks and, Nathan tells Caleb, doesn't understand English.

Even before entering the house – an edifice of cool organic modernism, all grey-stained wood-slats and floor-to-ceiling glass walls, built around rocks that intrude into the fabric – Caleb is wrong-footed. Trying to find a bell, he presses a button and a bright light flashes in his face. He's been photographed, and his absurd grimace of shock is captured on his key-card – which, as he's soon told, is a second-class *laissez-passer*, allowing him entrance only to certain rooms. His first sight of Nathan – and ours – shows what's coming: stripped to the waist, Nathan is pummeling a punch bag, a role to which (in psychological terms) the younger man will now be assigned. Claiming, as of right, insight into Caleb's thoughts and feelings – "I get the moment you're having" – Nathan patronises him under a cursory facade of macho bonhomie.

The architecture of Nathan's residence ("This isn't a house – it's a research facility," he tells Caleb) likewise enhances the plot and simultaneously foreshadows its denouement. Caleb's daily encounters with Ava take place in a glassed-in complex with a view on to a small, inaccessible garden; but paradoxically it's Caleb who's the more confined of the two, held in a small glass box within the space, while Ava is free to move around him. DP Rob Hardy works resourceful changes on this open-yet-closed environment, letting his camera roam around the dual captivity, modifying the lighting to foreground or disperse the characters' reflections, playing on their tantalising situation, at once close to each other and separated.

Although Ava, thanks to some seamless CGI, is depicted as more machine than human, a being of metal armatures, latex and transparent gel, in Vikander's subtly sensual performance her erotic appeal is evident, and Nathan relishes taunting Caleb over his growing attraction to the android. "Does Ava actually like you – or is she just pretending to like you?" he asks the embarrassed youth, adding slyly that he's incorporated a "pleasure centre" between Ava's legs. "You're the first man she's met who isn't me," he adds, leaving open the implication that, as her maker, he may well have already availed himself of her 'pleasure centre'. Caleb, who initially believed he won the assignment via a competition at work, gradually realises that he was specifically selected for the task, Nathan having even checked out his porn profile to ensure that Ava would be his type.

With his lanky, fresh-faced good looks, Gleeson is spot-on casting for Caleb, highly intelligent but none too clever, latching on too late to the way he's been played from more directions than one. For, as Nathan reminds him, "consciousness cannot exist without intention", and Ava has her agenda no less than her creator. Manipulated from both sides, his emotions tugged one way and his mind the other, Caleb becomes so discombobulated that at one point he slices into his own arm with a razor blade, fearing that he

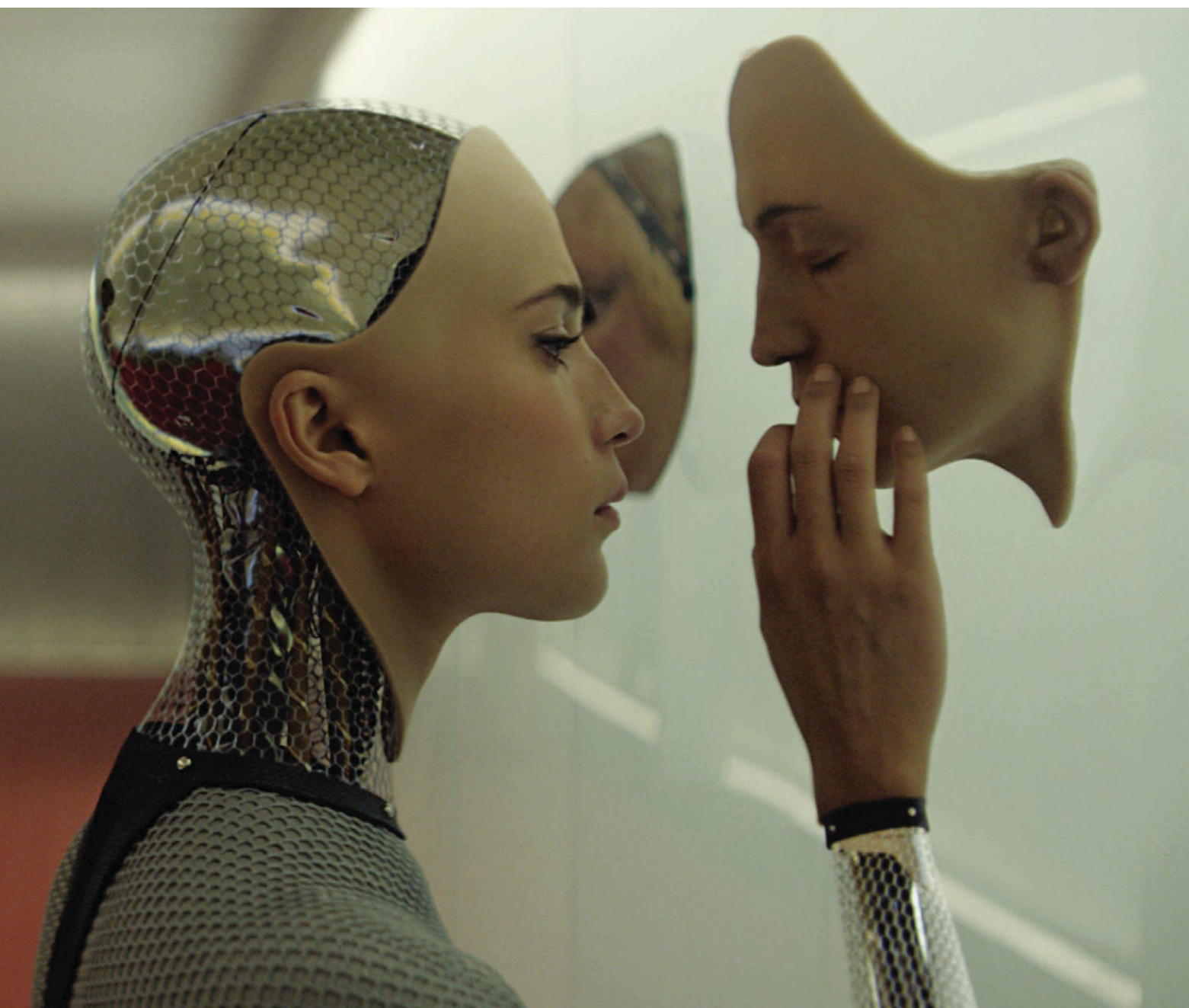


Face off: Alicia Vikander as android Ava

Androids may look like us, but to what extent do they think like we do? And what does it say about us that we've created them?



Domhnall Gleeson and Oscar Isaac



too may be an android without knowing it. This sense of uncertainty, of boundaries being elided, is enhanced by Geoff Barrow and Ben Salisbury's shimmering, glissading score, slithering liquidly around quarter-tones to heighten the tension while never falling into electronic cliché.

Last year in Spike Jonze's *Her*, a lonely writer (Joaquin Phoenix) fell in love with 'Samantha', his computer's operating system (seductively voiced by Scarlett Johansson), only to be devastated when she confessed to multiple 'infidelities' and abandoned him to seek out 'higher forms of consciousness' than the merely human. Garland's sharp, shrewdly paced film takes the next logical step, making Ava a physical presence and visiting an even crueller fate on her gullible admirer. (As in *Never Let Me Go*, Garland's sympathies are ultimately with the android.) The final scene, with Ava in her newly acquired human carapace mingling undetectably with crowds on a city street, invites us to wonder: how many other 'higher forms' might soon be walking among us – and what happens if, or when, they all gang up? 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Andrew Macdonald
Allon Reich
Written by
Alex Garland
Director of Photography

Rob Hardy
Editor
Mark Day
Production Designer
Mark Digby
Music
Geoff Barrow

Ben Salisbury
Production Sound Mixer
Mitch Low
Costume Designer
Sammy Sheldon

Production Companies
DNA Films, Film 4

Cast
Oscar Isaac

Nathan Bateman
Domhnall Gleeson
Caleb Smith
Alicia Vikander
Ava
Sonoya Mizuno
Kyoko

In Colour
Distributor
Universal Pictures
International UK & Eire

US, present day. Caleb Smith, a young coder at search engine Bluebook, wins a competition to spend a week with the company's reclusive billionaire CEO Nathan Bateman in his Alaskan mountain retreat. Caleb is taken there by helicopter. When he arrives, Nathan tells him what his task will be: to carry out a Turing Test on Nathan's latest AI android, Ava, to establish whether she's a sentient being. He's to talk to her each day, with Nathan listening in. The conversations are interrupted by power cuts, which Ava claims to be causing and which supposedly cut off the microphones. During one of these breaks she tells Caleb that he shouldn't trust Nathan. The only other person in the house is Kyoko, Nathan's assistant/lover, who never speaks.

Caleb is increasingly drawn to Ava, even though

she is visibly mechanical. Nathan asks his conclusions after each session, but Caleb is still uncertain. One evening Nathan passes out drunk. Lifting his key-card, Caleb explores off-limits rooms and finds female android prototypes stashed in closets. He promises Ava he'll get Nathan drunk again and escape with her. Caleb tells Nathan that Ava has passed the test. Nathan reveals that he knows about Caleb's plot and knocks him out. He goes to find Ava, but she and Kyoko – who's also an android – attack him. He disables Kyoko; Ava stabs him to death. She takes elements from the prototypes to make herself a complete human body. Caleb revives to find that Ava has shut him in the house with no escape. Ava meets the helicopter and is flown to a city.



In memoriam: Claude Lanzmann (right) with Benjamin Murrelstein in 1975 in *The Last of the Unjust*

The Last of the Unjust

France/Austria 2013

Director: Claude Lanzmann

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The Last of the Unjust joins previous works by Claude Lanzmann – *A Visitor from the Living* (1999), *Sobibór, October 14, 1943*, 4pm (2001), *The Karski Report* (2010) – as a spin-off/revisiting/outtake from *Shoah*, his mammoth 1985 documentary study of experiences and memories of the Holocaust.

Among the material left out of the final cut of *Shoah* were Lanzmann's lengthy interviews with Benjamin Murrelstein, conducted near the beginning of his project, in 1975. Murrelstein, an Austrian rabbi, was the third holder of the position of Jewish elder for the Nazi concentration camp at Theresienstadt, in what is now the Czech Republic. Presented to older, cultured and middle-class Jews as a safe haven, and to the wider world as a model ghetto, Theresienstadt in fact served for many as a stopping-off point on the way to the camps where they would die, and also witnessed many thousands of deaths itself from execution, starvation and disease. Murrelstein, unlike his two predecessors in the role of Jewish elder, survived the war, but

was widely scorned for working with Adolf Eichmann and the SS to run Theresienstadt and promote its deceptive public image. He was arrested in 1945 on suspicion of collaboration, but the charges were dropped after investigation; Lanzmann found him living in exile in Rome. His argument, as elaborated at length to Lanzmann, was that his time at Theresienstadt was dedicated to securing the safe deportation of thousands of Jews and improving living conditions for those who remained in the camp.

This is a position that Lanzmann, almost 40 years after interviewing Murrelstein for *Shoah*, has come to wholly support. He presents this film as an exoneration of its subject, even though



Painful truths: *The Last of the Unjust*

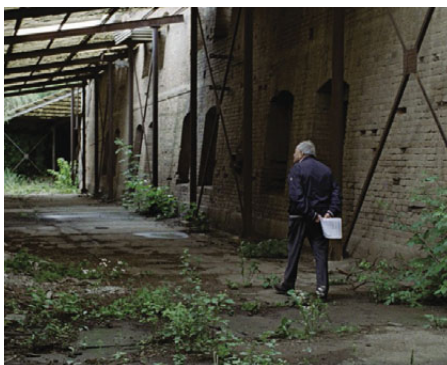
this chimes oddly with some of the interview footage, since the Lanzmann of the past took a less partisan position. (It is also too late for the man himself – Murrelstein died in 1989.) Interviewing for *Shoah*, Lanzmann was famously dogged, spiky and unsentimental, insisting that his interlocutors revisit agonising memories, and challenging them both on their actions at the time and the truth of their recollections thereafter. From partial memories, lies and self-justification as much as from verifiable reportage, he attempted not an accurate record of the Holocaust as a succession of events but rather an evocation of how that historical trauma existed in his present – how its architects and victims and bystanders had absorbed it into themselves. *Shoah* thus became a film about the slippery nature of testimony as much as a site of testimony in itself, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of faultless document, as well as one of cinema's most celebrated documentaries.

Thus, as well as allowing the eloquent Murrelstein to expound at length on what he witnessed and to take issue with those who have attacked him, Lanzmann is seen – through clouds of 1975 cigarette smoke – questioning his subject's apparent ability to mentally screen out the not-so-discreet 'eliminations' that were taking place around him; challenging Murrelstein on whether his project was to protect the ghetto or

to protect himself; and interrogating whether a “taste for power” influenced Murelstein's choice to remain in the service of the Nazis when he could have arranged his own deportation. Murelstein does not so much refute as ignore any implication of cynical self-preservation or capitulation to Nazi authority, acknowledging only that he took some pride in saving Jewish lives: “I have enough human weakness to tell you that I also found personal satisfaction in it.” Later, the distance he seems to have maintained from the murders that were being committed around him reveals itself in a vague anecdote about having to dispose of the ashes of the ghetto's Jewish dead. Lanzmann pushes his subject for a meaningful conclusion or an emotional response here, but none is forthcoming.

Murelstein's testimony is vigorous and erudite; one senses, perhaps sentimentally, that he may have been lonely during his years in Rome, and that his formidable intellect is flowering under Lanzmann's attentions. It is also evasive, imprecise, self-congratulatory, sometimes garbled and rarely pained – and at times disconcertingly buoyant, as when he describes voluntarily staying at Theresienstadt due to the fact that he “thirsted for adventure”. His tendency to draw comparisons between himself and figures from literature – he's Scheherazade, spinning a propaganda story for the Nazis to prevent his own destruction; he's Sancho Panza, a “calculating realist with two feet on the ground” as opposed to a tilter at windmills – indicates a tendency to self-mythologise but also seems to function as an intellectual distancing device: he prefers to present the past as a story than to engage with the emotions it stirs.

The Lanzmann of the present appears in this film revisiting the site of the camp and reading aloud from accounts of its functions, including Murelstein's own book, *Theresienstadt: Eichmann's Model Ghetto*, published in 1961. As if in disagreement with his past self about the point of doing the interview, this Lanzmann does not analyse, dispute or complicate Murelstein's version of events, or engage with the historical controversy around the role of Jews who worked with the Nazis. His interest is in emphasising that Theresienstadt was a death camp pure and simple, not the nice comfortable village portrayed



A journey through ruins: *The Last of the Unjust*

Murelstein's testimony is vigorous and erudite. It is also evasive, imprecise, self-congratulatory, sometimes garbled and rarely pained

in the propaganda flicks; that the Holocaust was an abomination; and that Murelstein is a hero much wronged by history. On and off camera, he resists the ambiguities thrown up by his own footage. Asked by Geoffrey Macnab during an interview for *The Independent* newspaper in March 2014 simply whether he had been surprised by the closeness of Murelstein's working relationship with Eichmann, he flew into a rage and called his interviewer “prejudiced”.

This feels, as a consequence, somewhat like a film at war with itself – which is interesting, of course, but which also creates a certain sense of raggedness and uncertainty of purpose. The film neither succeeds in fully redeeming Murelstein, since it leaves so much of his account unexamined, nor in challenging him, since Lanzmann has shed the desire to do that; nor in analysing the full experience, during and after the war, of those Jews who worked with the Nazis, since Lanzmann offers no wider consideration of that awkward and intriguing topic. Instead, he insists on an unrealistic and unavailable clarity – as when, with characteristic grandiosity, he

asserts of Murelstein: “He does not lie.” Quite possibly he doesn't; but such directive certainty on the part of the filmmaker, combined with the absence of any other accounts to complement Murelstein's own, has the effect of closing off the very moral and philosophical space that made *Shoah* so unsettling and revealing.

For many, of course, the context of this film makes critiquing it inappropriate, while the nature of Murelstein's experience makes querying his attitudes yet more so. “The film aesthetic does not matter here,” Murelstein's son Wolf, a zealous defender of his father's reputation, has stated in response to a negative critique of the film by J. Hoberman. What's significant to Wolf Murelstein is only that his father's evidence is finally out in the world; that there is a record of the testimony of a man who saved, by his own reckoning, around 123,000 Jewish lives; and that Lanzmann has made this possible. Unquestionably, Murelstein's story is fascinating, and his delivery of it compelling enough to hold the viewer rapt over long tracts of screen time. However, Lanzmann makes his subject's account less interesting, not more – as well as contradicting his own legacy as a maker of films that provoke responses rather than dictating them – when he insists that it is above critique, complication or contradiction. ❧

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
David Frenkel
Jean Labadie
Danny Krausz
Cinematography
William Lubtchansky
Caroline Champetier
Editor
Chantal Hymans
Sound
Antoine Bonfanti
Manuel Grandpierre
Alexander Koller

@Synecdoche, Le
Pacte, Dor Film,
Les Films Aleph
Production
Companies
A Synecdoche, Le
Pacte, Dor Film,

Les Films Aleph
production
In co-production with
France 3 Cinéma
With the
participation of
Canal+, Ciné+,
France Télévisions,
ORF (Film/Fernseh-
Abkommen), Centre
National du Cinéma
et de l'Image Animée
With the support of
Région Île-de-France
in partnership
with CNC,
Österreichisches
Filminstitut,
Filmfonds Wien, La
Fondation pour la
Mémoire de la Shoah

Developed with the
support of Cinéma
7 Développement

Dolby Digital
In Colour and
Black and White
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Eureka
Entertainment

French theatrical title
Le Dernier des
injustes

A documentary framed around archive interview footage. Opening text explains that while director Claude Lanzmann did not use Benjamin Murelstein's story in his 1985 film 'Shoah', as originally intended, he has come to feel that he has “no right to keep it to myself”. Murelstein was the third Jewish elder of the Nazi 'show ghetto' at Theresienstadt, in Bohemia, and the only one to survive the war; decry for collaboration, he moved to Rome, where Lanzmann interviewed him in 1975. Footage from this interview – in which Murelstein explains how he maintained the ghetto and its fraudulent PR image only for the good of its inmates, arranging for some 123,000 of them to be deported to safety – is interspersed with contemporary material in which Lanzmann visits the site of the ghetto and the stations from which Jews were moved from camp to camp. He reads from Murelstein's 1961 book 'Theresienstadt: Eichmann's Model Ghetto', which describes how elderly Jews were promised a haven at Theresienstadt, only to be delivered to an overcrowded and disease-ridden concentration camp, contrasting these images with propaganda footage portraying Theresienstadt as a cheerful, culturally rich community. At the end of the film, 1975 footage shows Murelstein strolling in Rome with Lanzmann, angrily taking issue with Israeli Jews who have called for his execution, and noting that as a surviving elder he is an inconvenient witness bound to clash with both Germans and Jews.



The Nazi camp at Theresienstadt was presented to the world as a model ghetto

Annie

USA/Australia 2014
Director: Will Gluck
Certificate PG 118m 12s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Riffing on scenarios from the stage musical and its 1982 film adaptation by John Huston without changing the spirit of the story, this smart, funny twenty-first-century update of *Annie* always hits the right notes between the songs. Neatly encapsulating the gaps between old (poor) and new (ultra-wealthy) New York with small details, Annie (Quvenzhané Wallis) is a foster kid who lives in Harlem as part of a benefits scam run by blowsy drunk Colleen Hannigan (Cameron Diaz). Annie gets swept into the public eye by mayoral candidate and cell-phone magnate Will Stacks (Jamie Foxx): like President Obama, Stacks's picky eating habits are revealed on the campaign trail when he spits soup kitchen mashed potatoes onto a homeless man; when he saves Annie from being hit by a truck, he also saves his poll numbers. The musical numbers are engineered to be enigmatic and moving but Wallis's singing routinely comes up short – it turns out there are some things auto-tune can't fix. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James Lassiter
Will Gluck
Jada Pinkett Smith
Will Smith
Caleb Pinkett
Shawn 'Jay-Z' Carter
Laurence 'Jay' Brown
Tyran 'Ty Ty' Smith
Screenplay
Will Gluck
Aline Brosh McKenna
Based on the musical
stage play *Annie*
Book by Thomas
Meehan, music by
Charles Strouse,
lyrics by Martin
Charnin
and on *Little*
Orphan Annie
Director of
Photography
Michael Grady
Editor
Tia Nolan
Production
Designer
Marcia Hinds
Music
Greg Kurstin
Original Songs
Sia
Greg Kurstin
Will Gluck
Production Mixer
Tod Maitland
Costume Designer
Renée Ehrlich Kalfus
Choreography
Zachary Woodlee

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Village Roadshow
Films North
America Inc./Village
Roadshow Films
(BVI) Limited
Production
Companies
Columbia Pictures
presents in
association with
Village Roadshow
Pictures an
Overbrook
Entertainment
production with
Marcy Media Films
and Olive Bridge
Entertainment
A Will Gluck film
Executive
Producers
Celia Costas
Alicia Emmrich

Cast
Jamie Foxx
Will Stacks
Quvenzhané Wallis
Annie B.
Rose Byrne
Grace
Bobby Cannavale
Guy
Adewale
Akinnuoye-Agbaje
Nash
David Zayas
Lou
Cameron Diaz

New York, the present. Ten-year-old Annie hurries to a restaurant after school in the hopes of seeing her parents. Annie and her fellow foster kids clean up their apartment for state inspection while Colleen Hannigan, their guardian, does nothing. Mayoral candidate and cell-phone mogul Will Stacks saves Annie from getting hit by a truck; after a video of the incident goes viral, Stacks's campaign staff advise him to spend more time with her. Annie moves in with him and they grow closer. A campaign adviser feels that she's served her purpose and works with Hannigan to get a couple to pretend to be Annie's parents. Annie realises they're frauds. Stacks tracks her down using Instagram photos. After saving her, Stacks withdraws from the election and adopts Annie.

Beyond Clueless

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Charlie Lyne
Certificate 15 88m 45s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

If the title of *Beyond Clueless* alludes to Amy Heckerling's impeccable youth comedy *Clueless* (1995), then it also promises to take us further and deeper. Indeed, much like Heckerling's Austen-inspired exposé of contemporary teen mores, Charlie Lyne's debut film has the rituals and routines of adolescence in its sights, although it universalises them not through the frame of a 19th-century novel but through the tropes and clichés of cinema itself. For this is a postmodern portrait of growing pains filtered through their past representations in teen movies, the 'parallel universe' that has in some way accompanied, modulated and influenced all our rites of passage.

Beyond Clueless is a documentary but it plays like a fever dream, capturing all the wide-eyed disorientation that accompanies coming of age. With admirable purism, its visual palette is confined entirely (apart from credits and captions) to a selection of clips from some 200 teen movies made between 1992 and 2006 – their very datedness inflecting them with the nostalgia of lost youth and passing time. These teen films would have formed the background to Lyne's own adolescence (he was born in 1991), while *Beyond Clueless* itself encodes his subsequent maturation into a sophisticated, reflective film critic and filmmaker; the incisive commentary he's written to accompany clips of films such as 1996's *The Craft* (with which *Beyond Clueless* opens) is delivered in arch voiceover by one of *The Craft*'s own young stars, Fairuza Balk, herself now older and wiser. Similarly, the glimpses we catch of a youthful Robert Pattinson, Lindsay Lohan, Jeremy Sisto, Natasha Lyonne and Jake Gyllenhaal remind us of who they – and along with them we – once were, and have since become.

Certain films – typically less obvious, more obscure than *Clueless* – are singled out by the script for synopsis, analysis and interpretation, as Lyne weaves his abstract, impressionistic way through the anguish and ecstasy of growing up. *Idle Hands* (1999) and *Ginger Snaps* (2000) illustrate the bodily transformations that challenge teen identity; *Jeepers Creepers* (2001) and *EuroTrip* (2004) dramatise the incomplete repression of desire; *The Faculty* (1998) and *Josie and the Pussycats* (2001) focus on resistance to conformity; *Disturbing Behaviour* (1998) and 13

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Anthony Ing
Billy Boyd Cape
Charlie Lyne
Written by
Charlie Lyne
Edited by
Charlie Lyne
Original Music
Summer Camp

©Beyond
Clueless Ltd

Production
Companies
Joe Stephenson
presents a film
by Charlie Lyne
Executive
Producers
Louis Bhoose
Miles Haughton
Oliver Levy
Fred Macpherson
Sue Odell

narrated by
Fairuza Balk

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Beyond Clueless Ltd

Using a montage of clips from teen movies circa 1992-2006, this documentary explores both the experiences and cinematic representations of adolescence. The film is divided into five headed sections (plus prologue and epilogue), all with a voiceover commentary.



Teen time: *The Craft*

Going on 30 (2004) show the pitfalls of prolonged adolescence; and *The Craft* and *Spider-Man* (2002), which bookend the film, point to the empowerment that comes of successfully negotiating high school and entering adulthood.

Other titles are cut up into masterfully edited mosaics, so that stock teen-movie scenes – house parties, first sexual encounters, school corridor walks, masturbation, etc – are shown in fluid multi-movie montages in which each film, like any high-schooler, must struggle to maintain individual identity in the crowd. Accordingly, even as Lyne charts the cliques, codes and rules of teendom itself, he is also revealing the building blocks that constitute every high-school movie. *Beyond Clueless* is, after all, a structuralist work, using a compelling collation of similar imagery from different sources to make accessible and intelligible the system beneath the chaos of adolescent experience, real and represented.

The protean multiplicity of fresh-faced high-school arrivals shown in the prologue to *Beyond Clueless* and the graduation ceremonies celebrated in its epilogue demarcate the conventional boundaries of the teen years. Yet the film's fifth and final chapter ('Moving On') considers the "perverse nightmare of indefinite adolescence" wherein folk well beyond their clueless teens still cling to those glory years, making "a warped adult simulation of their teenaged lives". This is where Lyne's backward-looking film is at its most reflexive: filmmakers working in the teen genre are rarely themselves still in their teens, and so the films that *Beyond Clueless* showcases, as well as the documentary itself, are products of a sort of arrested development. Yet much as, in trying to puzzle out her precise feelings for a manchild she has liked since high school, Claire Forlani's college student Jennifer in *Boys and Girls* (2000) "resorts to a reliable source of expertise – teen movies", we too at times look to our formative years (or at least to their cinematic instantiations) for answers to our present cluelessness. To the accompaniment of *Summer Camp*'s fantastic score, Lyne's film allows us to do just that, with insight, wit and flair. **S**

Big Eyes

USA 2014
Director: Tim Burton
Certificate 12A 105m 36s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Camp is an ever-expanding universe, with associations and varieties as delicate as a spider's web. Bruce LaBruce's 'Notes on Camp/ Anti-Camp', both an update and a response to Susan Sontag's landmark essay, provides myriad useful new classifications such as 'classic gay camp', 'reactionary camp' and 'good intentional straight camp'. Tim Burton's films, save for *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* (1985) and *Ed Wood* (1994), are on LaBruce's list of 'bad straight camp' – "a sensibility that has been appropriated by the mainstream, turned into a commodity fetish and exploited by a hypercapitalist system". (Having grown up with Burton's films, I'm tempted to resist this charge, but quantitatively speaking, he has spent most of his career rehashing previous work or crafting elaborate CGI worlds in which Helena Bonham Carter and Johnny Depp shriek at each other through layers of makeup.)

Big Eyes reunites Burton with *Ed Wood* screenwriters Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski, and it largely succeeds at being a paean to the artist behind the kitsch. Margaret Keane (Amy Adams), like the filmic version of Edward D. Wood Jr, is a sentimental fool who's driven to create, choosing to express herself by painting oversized eyes because she feels that "they're the windows to the soul" – not because it's, like, so hilariously bad it's good or whatever. It's incredibly refreshing to have a protagonist who is neither steeped in irony nor absorbed by their own feelings, and whose actions have some pretty high stakes: after leaving her first husband, Margaret struggles to support her daughter because, having gone from daughter to wife to mother, she has no work experience. Alexander and Karaszewski's script succeeds in hitting a delicate balance, never overemphasising her role as a carer: this film is about an artist who happens to be a mother, not the other way round. Her multiple roles are equally evident in her struggle to go along



Seeing is deceiving: Amy Adams, Christoph Waltz

with the lie that her second husband, Walter (Christoph Waltz), painted her "big-eyed waifs"; she's shown suffering for being denied the self-confidence that comes with public recognition, and from being dishonest with her child.

The biggest difference between this and *Ed Wood* is a lack of charm. While the underlying message of the earlier film was continued positivity in the face of adversity (or lack of skill), which would be wrong to impose on *Big Eyes*, it also featured pitch-perfect performances from the entire cast. Most of the responsibility here rests on Waltz's and Adams's shoulders, and they never quite hit the right notes. As if trapped by her blonde wig, Adams perpetually seems more flustered than besieged, her sss stiffness never revealing a larger inner conflict. And with his grating intonation, Waltz is often painful to watch, and only comes close when, very unwisely, Walter chooses to represent himself after Margaret has taken him to court. The disjunction between his outlandish Perry Mason-style tactics and the very real court proceedings carries an energy (and laughs) that the rest of the film could've used more of. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lynette Howell
Scott Alexander
Larry Karaszewski
Tim Burton
Written by
Scott Alexander
Larry Karaszewski
Director of
Photography
Bruno Delbonnel
Edited by
J.C. Bond

Production Designer
Rick Heinrichs
Music
Danny Elfman
Sound Mixer
Chris Dueterdiek
Costume Designer
Colleen Atwood

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Production
Companies

The Weinstein Company presents a Tim Burton film
With the participation of British Columbia Production Services
Tax Credit, Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit
Executive Producers
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein
Jamie Patricof

Katterli Frauenfelder
Derek Frey

Cast

Amy Adams
Margaret Keane
Christoph Waltz
Walter Keane
Danny Huston
Dick Nolan
Jon Polito
Enrico Banducci

Krysten Ritter
Dee-Ann
Jason Schwartzman
Ruben
Terrence Stamp
John Canaday
Delaney Raye
young Jane
Madeleine Arthur
older Jane

Dolby Digital
In Colour

Colour by
Technicolor
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

San Francisco, the 1950s. Margaret Ulbrich is a struggling single mother, selling her paintings at a weekend art fair in a park, where she meets outgoing artist Walter Keane. They begin dating and soon marry. Walter rents space at The Hungry i jazz club to show their work. Margaret's paintings of children with big eyes prove popular but Walter's Parisian street scenes don't sell. Walter begins taking credit for Margaret's paintings and opens a gallery dedicated to 'his' work. Cheap poster reproductions of the paintings also prove profitable. Margaret discovers a crate of Walter's street scenes, signed by another person, but he continues to insist that he painted them. Walter uses his influence to get a commission for Unicef's Hall of Education at the 1964 World's Fair, but

it is lambasted by the leading art critic of the 'New York Times'. Walter attacks the critic at a party; the painting is removed before the opening. Soon afterwards, a drunken Walter threatens Margaret and daughter Jane with lighted matches. Margaret and Jane move to Hawaii. Before granting her a divorce, Walter demands that she paint another 100 paintings for him, which she does.

Later, Margaret announces the truth about the paintings on a radio programme. Walter retaliates by having a gossip columnist write a story saying that Margaret is a crazy drunk. Margaret sues Walter for slander. The judge gives Walter and Margaret an hour to finish a painting in front of the court. Walter claims an arm injury; Margaret wins the case.

Big Hero 6

USA 2014
Directors: Don Hall, Chris Williams

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

I saw Disney's CGI cartoon *Big Hero 6* when it premiered at the Tokyo International Film Festival, promoted under its Japanese title *Baymax*. This is also the name of the marshmallow-textured, blow-up droid who supports a bereaved boy through grief and anger. Baymax steals the film – he's a loveable, inherently cartoonish creation, given to motherly hugs, whoopee-cushion deflations and an endearing, fastidious awkwardness worthy of Christopher Reeve's Clark Kent.

Baymax is placed in a superhero story – specifically a Marvel superhero story, based on a Marvel comic that began in 1998. (The film is tied up post-credits by a mildly amusing animated cameo from Stan Lee.) Unlike Pixar's *The Incredibles* (2004), which highlighted middle-aged angst, *Big Hero 6* sets up a plucky band of kid science prodigies who forge themselves into a junior Avengers, making future technology their superpowers in a fantasy metropolis. The city is a mishmash of San Francisco and Tokyo ('San Fransokyo') where the Golden Gate Bridge has Shinto-style gates, there are trams on steep streets, and giant Asian 'lucky cat' figures.

The hero-group story sometimes clashes with the plotline that *Big Hero 6* wants us to care about – the relationship between Baymax and one of the kids, Hiro, who loses his big brother (Baymax's inventor). This is a touching thread; it never approaches the poetic pathos of Pixar's *Up* (2009), but younger viewers who've suffered their own loss may connect with the emotionally skittish Hiro more than with *Up*'s curmudgeonly Carl Fredricksen. The film takes a startling turn for a Disney cartoon when Hiro's grief turns into murderous anger, though the way it's resolved feels too pat and easy.

Beyond the emotional tentpoles of Baymax and Hiro, the script is smart and enjoyable, but the plot eventually descends into comic-strip staples. The climax, for example, takes place in a cosmic chasm of urban debris and swirling colours, which is very impressive to watch but somehow feels like a premature remake of the finale of *Avengers Assembled* (2012). The other kid heroes feel, if not quite one-note, then surplus to the film. They'd work better in a TV series where their personalities could fill out over successive weeks. *Big Hero 6* strikes



Inflatable friend: *Big Hero 6*

an arch tone about comic-strip clichés – these kids *know* they're in a comic-strip adventure – yet it still resorts to the Enid Blyton *Famous Five* device of characterising its two main females as a pink (if feisty) girly girl and a tomboy.

Action scenes in CGI are usually much more distancing than in live action, yet *Big Hero 6* pulls off an excellent mid-film car chase that's artfully kinetic and exciting. Later, Baymax takes to the sky in a crimson power suit like a barrel-shaped Iron Man; it's an exhilarating image but feels more generic, while the later battles are standard-order action fare. Baymax himself lifts a good adventure cartoon film into something rather better. However, it's doubtful that he's a strong enough promotional image to raise the film near the box-office stratosphere of *Frozen*. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Roy Conli
Screenplay
Robert L. Baird
Daniel Gerson
Jordan Roberts
Big Hero 6 team and characters created by Man of Action
Directors of Cinematography
Layout:
Rob Dressel
Lighting:
Adolph Lusinsky
Edited by
Tim Mertens
Production Designer
Paul Felix
Original Score
Henry Jackman
Supervising Sound Editor & Designer
Shannon Mills
Animation Supervisors

Nathan Engelhardt
Brent Homman
Jason Figliozzi
Michael Franceschi
Doug Bennett

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Production Company
Walt Disney Animation Studios
Executive Producer
John Lasseter

Voice Cast

Scott Adsit
Baymax
Ryan Potter
Hiro
Daniel Henney
Tadashi
T.J. Miller
Fred
Jamie Chung
Go Go

Damon Wayans Jr
Wasabi
Genesis Rodriguez
Honey Lemon
James Cromwell
Professor Robert Callaghan
Alan Tudyk
Alistair Krei
Maya Rudolph
Cass
Stan Lee
Fred's dad

Dolby Digital/Dolby Atmos/DataSat
In Colour
Prints by
Fotokem
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

In the city of San Fransokyo, 14-year-old Hiro fritters away his scientific genius. His big brother Tadashi entices him to San Fransokyo Tech, where Hiro is dazzled by the technology on display. This includes 'Baymax', a gentle, cuddly nursing droid with inflatable skin, invented by Tadashi. Hiro befriends other school prodigies Go Go, Honey Lemon and Wasabi, plus college dropout Fred.

Hiro is challenged by Professor Callaghan to come up with a new invention. He devises microbots – miniature robots that build themselves into a huge range of structures. Hiro triumphantly demonstrates his invention at the college fair. Shortly afterwards, the building explodes; Tadashi and Callaghan are lost. Grieving, Hiro shuts himself away, but he inadvertently reactivates Baymax, who starts caring for him. They find that a kabuki-masked figure is using Hiro's microbots. Hiro recruits his student friends to fight the masked figure, empowering them with their inventions, and builds Baymax into a flying armoured droid.

The youngsters unmask their enemy, who's revealed to be Callaghan. He caused the explosion and stole the microbots to take revenge on industrialist Alistair Krei. Krei conducted experiments in matter teleportation in which Callaghan's daughter, a test subject, disappeared. Hiro tries to use Baymax to kill Callaghan, but his friends bring him to his senses. Finally, the youngsters defeat Callaghan. Hiro and Baymax enter the matter teleporter and save Callaghan's daughter. Baymax is stranded in the void but gives Hiro a microchip that carries his robot soul. Hiro resurrects Baymax in a new body.

Exodus Gods and Kings

USA/Spain/United Kingdom 2014

Director: Ridley Scott

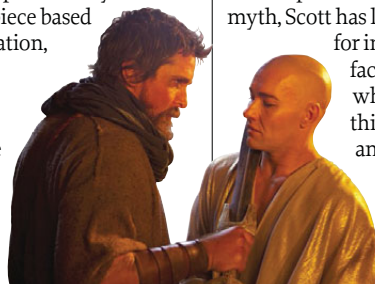
Certificate 12A 150m 3s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Well of course the plagues are a riot – Nile crocodiles in a feeding frenzy and locusts and all that. You could hardly expect them to bollocks that up, it's natural blockbuster stuff, the very reason for a movie called *Exodus: Gods and Kings* to exist. When I was a boy, I was obsessed with J.M.W. Turner's *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* (the scene depicted is actually the Seventh Plague, but you must understand that this was pre-Google), which hangs in the Indianapolis Museum of Art. The appeal of such images does not have to be explained – it's the same appeal held by, say, Godzilla wading through downtown Tokyo.

Ridley Scott probably had Turner's *Plague* passed down to his CGI galley slaves before they set to the carpal tunnel-wrecking work of hauling pixels to create his latest monumental edifice, while Scott's longtime production designer Arthur Max appears to have pored over the Orientalist canvases of the high-finish French Academy painters of the mid-19th century. No pre-production stone has gone unturned, although somebody ought to fire the joker who reported that the ruling class of the 19th Dynasty of Egypt – and a goodly portion of their Hebrew slaves – were Anglo-Saxon or at the very least white. (Seeing Scott's movie preceded by a trailer for another period piece based on the struggle for emancipation, Ava DuVernay's *Selma*, was to say the least a bracing experience.) Maybe the principal historical resource was Howard Hawks's *Land of the Pharaohs*?

Bale, Edgerton



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Peter Chernin
Ridley Scott
Jenno Topping
Michael Schaeffer
Mark Huffman
Written by
Adam Cooper
Bill Collage
Jeffrey Caine
Steven Zaillian
Director of Photography
Dariusz Wolski
Film Editor
Billy Rich
Production Designer
Arthur Max
Music
Alberto Iglesias
Supervising Sound Editor/Designer
Oliver Tarney
Costume Designer
Janty Yates
Stunt Co-ordinator
Rob Inch
Visual Effects
Double Negative
MPC
Scanline
Method Studios
Lola Post
Peerless

©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Productions

Ramses, A.I.E. and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC
Production Companies
A Twentieth Century Fox presentation in association with TSG Entertainment
A Scott Free/Chernin Entertainment production
A Ridley Scott film
A Twentieth Century Fox Production
Ramses, A.I.E.
co-production
Québec Production Services Tax Credit

Cast

Christian Bale
Moses
Joel Edgerton
Ramses
John Turturro
Seti
Aaron Paul
Joshua
Ben Mendelsohn
Viceroy Hegep
Maria Valverde
Zipporah
Sigourney Weaver
Tuya
Ben Kingsley
Nun

Isaac Andrews
Malak
Hiam Abbass
Bithia
Indira Varma
high priestess
Ewen Bremner
expert
Golshifteh Farahani
Nefertari
Ghassan Massoud
Ramses' grand vizier
Tara Fitzgerald
Miriam

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

William Faulkner, who had a hand in writing Hawks's 1956 movie, couldn't crack the problem of creating a vernacular for an Egyptian noble, so made him talk "like a Kentucky colonel". If Faulkner couldn't lick this challenge, it's a safe bet that Scott's quartet of hirelings isn't going to do much better, and so we get lines like the much-quoted "From an economic standpoint, what you are asking is problematic to say the least," spoken by Ramses II (Joel Edgerton) when his brother-in-arms-turned-leader-of-the-rebel-Hebrews, Moses (Christian Bale), is holding a sword to his throat.

Over the first two-thirds of *Exodus: Gods and Kings* – by my reckoning, approximately 11 hours of screentime – these two begin as cohorts and reunite as mortal foes, in such a morass of pained hamming that nothing short of God can redeem it. And lo, He eventually does appear, not just as an old-hat burning bush, but as a reedy-voiced little moppet whose version of Old Testament anger as petulant, boyish caprice makes one think of Joe Dante's 'It's a Good Life' segment in *Twilight Zone: The Movie*, if it had been done without a trace of humour. The exteriors were for the most part shot in rugged Almería, Spain, where the ghost of Sam Bronston presumably presided over the production, and though the landscape has the necessary dimensions of myth, Scott has lost any knack that he ever had for invoking ritual grandiosity. In

fact, it's hard to think of anyone who could've adequately handled this material – Anthony Mann and Pasolini are dead, and so is Mel Gibson's career. As it is, we get a few passages of awful grandeur, and much else that is less than run of DeMille. **C**

Egypt, 1300 BC. The Egyptians, ruled by Pharaoh Seti I, move to meet a Hittite army. In the field of battle, Ramses, Seti's son, is saved from almost certain death by Moses, a general who has been raised as his brother. After Seti's death, Ramses hears a rumour that Moses is a child born of the enslaved Hebrews, and his mother, Queen Tuya, uses this as a pretext to banish Moses to almost certain death in the desert. Arriving at a small village called Midian, Moses becomes a shepherd and takes a wife, Zipporah, with whom he has a son. After nine years of living in peaceful obscurity, Moses climbs a mountain near Midian and hears the voice of God, who appears personified as a young boy. God asks Moses to become his general, leading the Hebrews to freedom and back to their homeland, Canaan. Under Moses, the Hebrews orchestrate a series of hit-and-run attacks on the Egyptians, and the Pharaoh instructs the execution of innocent Hebrew families in reprisal. When conventional warfare doesn't work, God unleashes a series of plagues upon the Egyptians: The Nile runs red with blood; frogs, flies, and locusts clog the streets; and the firstborn children of the Egyptians, including the son of the pharaoh, die in their sleep. After this Ramses agrees to free the Hebrews, then leads a war party on their trail, with the intention of taking his revenge. Moses, guiding the Hebrews through the wilderness, brings them to the shore of the Red Sea, which parts at an expression of his faith, so that they may pass to the other shore. The waters close on the pursuing pharaoh and his army, allowing the Hebrews to escape. Taking dictation from God, Moses transcribes the Ten Commandments.

Foxcatcher

Director: Bennett Miller
Certificate 15 134m 18s

Reviewed by Calum Marsh

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Bennett Miller's *Foxcatcher* begins in a rather funereal register – and at first it isn't clear why. We're introduced to Mark Schultz (Channing Tatum), an Olympic gold medallist of record-low confidence, giving a dull speech to an auditorium of elementary schoolchildren... for which he receives a handwritten cheque from the secretary's office for a whopping \$20. Nipping in for groceries with a coupon book on his way home, Mark picks up a bowl of microwaveable noodles, which he later proceeds to slurp, blowing on each sad spoonful, alone and hunched over in his dreary grey apartment. A few short, quiet moments in the life of a professional wrestler, and we get it: there's a profound anguish here. Rarely has despair been illustrated with such economy.

Between *Capote* (2005) and *Foxcatcher*, Miller is proving himself the poet laureate of gloom – a dubious honour, perhaps, but he certainly does it handsomely. Schultz's routine is gorgeously (if morosely) realised, emboldened by the crisp, neutral-toned cinematography of *Zero Dark Thirty* DP Greig Fraser. But with gloom, it seems, comes portent, and as in *Capote* Miller can't help but render every benign look and gesture ominous; he knows what calamities lie on the horizon, even if his characters (and his audience) don't, and long before tragedy reveals itself he makes us feel the anticipation. There's a perverse sort of self-fulfilment in this strategy: it's as if the sudden spikes of violence that disrupt otherwise ordinary lives were in some sense inevitable, awaiting the right moment to emerge. What Miller doesn't apprehend, or outright rejects, is that in life, tragedy is rarely foreshadowed. This is his second true-crime film, and the second to scour for clues before the crime: the suggestions and whispers, however faint, that what happened was by design.

In the film, as in life, Schultz is courted by millionaire John du Pont (Steve Carell), who wishes him to train on his private grounds and wrestle under the aegis of Team Foxcatcher, with the considerable resources of du Pont's empire at his disposal. Carell, in a ridiculous prosthetic nose, plays du Pont as a well-meaning but somewhat eccentric man, dedicated in earnest



Why we fight: Steve Carell

to the sport of wrestling – and to the cultivation of Schultz as his star. But Miller can't resist an air of perennial unease, and consequently du Pont seems a vaguely menacing figure more than an hour before he does anything wrong. Perhaps it's fair to assume that the audience will be aware, going into the film, what du Pont will ultimately do: it hardly spoils the picture to be abreast of the news. But without any notion that the real-life John du Pont shot and killed Dave Schultz, Mark's brother, in 1996, one might find Miller's constant intimations of peril odd. Without the punctuation of murder, the story of the Schultzes and du Pont is nothing more than peculiar. Miller makes every exchange seem fraught, every action ill fated, and in the end the gunshot merely justifies the air of doom. But what's most fascinating about this story isn't its sensational ending. And what's most moving is its simplest touch: Schultz, sitting meekly at his kitchen table, sipping spoonfuls of the world's saddest soup. ➦

The Gambler

USA 2014
Director: Rupert Wyatt
Certificate 15 110m 50s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Rupert Wyatt's update of Karel Reisz's 1974 *The Gambler* comes swathed in pop music: when debt-ridden Los Angeles novelist-turned-professor Jim Bennett (Mark Wahlberg) takes a call from his brutal loan shark (Michael K. Williams) it's to the tune of Pink Floyd's 'Money'; a shot of Jim's prize student and possible lover Amy (Brie Larson) walking across campus is overlaid by Pulp's 'Common People', a song that frames her simultaneously as a hipster and the salt of the earth. This strategy reaches its nadir when Jim and Amy have an argument about his dangerous and impulsive behaviour while a student choir rehearses a performance of 'Creep' by Radiohead. It feels like the director should have quit while he was ahead.

Meanwhile, if I might use another gambling analogy, screenwriter William Monahan goes all in. His script's punchy, pungent dialogue (every other line is a maxim or a violent threat) and bludgeoning dramaturgy suggest that he's trying to out-Toback James Toback, which means of course that he has no choice but to take things over the top. He's taken the basic premise of Reisz and Toback's original film – a smart guy does dumb things that he must literally and figuratively pay for – and blown it up into something monumental. It's not just a case of economic inflation (Jim owes various gangsters \$250,000 instead of the \$44,000 in the 1974 version), but also the creative calculus of 21st-century big-studio filmmaking, in which even a nominally modest, character-based narrative has to look and sound like a possible box-office behemoth. That's why Wyatt, who did such a slam-bang job choreographing CGI gorillas in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011) was hired to direct, and why so many lip-smacking supporting actors (Jessica Lange, a bald-pated John Goodman) are on hand to chew their lines into a pulp.

To be fair, excess isn't the worst quality for a movie about a man who doesn't think twice about betting more than a year's salary on a single spin of a roulette wheel, and Wahlberg convincingly portrays the character's arrogance and desperation (and he's actually credible lecturing his literature students ➦)



The roulette class: Mark Wahlberg, Brie Larson

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Megan Ellison
Bennett Miller
Jon Kilik
Anthony Bregman

Written by

E. Max Frye
Dan Futterman

Director of

Photography

Greig Fraser

Editors

Stuart Levy
Conor O'Neill
Jay Cassidy

Production Designer

Jess Gonchor

Music

Rob Simonsen
Sound Mixer
Jim Emswiler
Costume Designer
Kasia Maimone
Waliicka

Production

Companies

Sony Pictures
Classics presents
an Annapurna
Pictures production
in association with
Likely Story
A film by Bennett
Miller

Executive Producers

Chelsea Barnard
Ron Schmidt
Mark Bakshi
Michael Coleman
Tom Heller

Cast

Steve Carell
John Eleuthère
du Pont
Channing Tatum
Mark Schultz
Mark Ruffalo

Dave Schultz

Vanessa Redgrave

Jean du Pont

Sienna Miller

Nancy Schultz

Anthony

Michael Hall

Jack

Guy Boyd

Henry Beck

Dolby Digital/

Datasat

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

EI Films

Pennsylvania, 1988. Wrestler Mark Schultz, an Olympic gold medallist, trains daily with his similarly decorated older brother Dave for the next Olympic games. Asked to fly out to meet John Eleuthère du Pont, a well-respected but eccentric millionaire who lives in a vast country estate, Mark finds himself offered the opportunity to lead an Olympic wrestling team under the du Pont banner, with state-of-the-art training grounds, his choice of teammates and a generous budget. Under du Pont's guidance, Mark achieves considerable success and is confident of Olympic success. But the lonely du Pont lures the normally ascetic Mark into a routine of heavy drinking and hard drug use, affecting his training. Dave is called in to whip Mark and the team back into shape. Over time he convinces Mark to give up his addictions. After losing their Olympic titles, Mark and Dave return to the du Pont estate to find themselves barred from entering, and return home. One afternoon soon afterwards, du Pont drives out to Dave's family home and shoots him dead, escaping by car. After a brief chase, he is arrested by the police.

about Camus, too). It's a fully realised performance, but other aspects of the movie feel patched together, especially Larson's role as a supposedly brilliant writer who's given no showcase for her talents – and who spends most of her screen time looking hungrily at a burned-out mentor figure nearly 20 years her senior. That's the self-deprecating and self-flattering macho fantasy of *The Gambler*: that the more selfish you are and the more you suffer, the more attractive and dynamic you become. By the end, Wahlberg's character resembles nothing so much as an existential action figure with all the requisite accessories (black eye, bloody lip, rumpled suit): the perfect toy for a screenwriter playing serious-movie dress-up. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mark Wahlberg
Stephen Levinson
Irwin Winkler
Robert Chartoff
David Winkler
Screenplay
William Monahan
Based upon the
film written by
James Toback
Director of
Photography
Greig Fraser
Edited by
Pete Beaudreau
Production
Designer
Keith Cunningham
Music
Jon Brion
Theo Green
Re-recording
Mixers
Ron Bartlett
Chuck Michael
Costume Designer
Jacqueline West

©Paramount
Pictures Corporation
Production
Companies
Paramount Pictures
presents a Chartoff
Winkler production
A Closest To The

Hole/Leverage
Entertainment
production
A Rupert Wyatt film
With the
participation of the
State of California
and the California
Film Commission
Executive
Producers
David Crockett
James Toback
William Monahan

Cast

Mark Wahlberg
Jim Bennett
John Goodman
Frank
Brie Larson
Amy Phillips
Michael Kenneth
Williams
Neville Baraka
George Kennedy
Ed
Jessica Lange
Roberta
Richard Schiff
jeweller
Andre Braugher
Dean Fuller
Emory Cohen
Dexter
Domenick

Lombardozzi
Big Ernie
Anthony Kelley
Lamar Allen
Alvin Ling
Mister Lee

Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount
Pictures UK

Los Angeles, the present. One-time bestselling novelist and university English professor Jim Bennett owes more than \$200,000 in gambling debts to a Korean gangster, and borrows another \$50,000 from loan shark Neville, which he promptly loses on a bad bet. One of Jim's graduate students, Amy, works nights at the gambling parlour and recognises him; he tells her that she is the only genius in his class. Given seven days to pay back his loans, Jim approaches Jewish mob boss Frank, who says he'll cover the amount if Jim admits he isn't a real man; Jim refuses. He's given \$260,000 by his mother, Roberta, who tells him that if he doesn't use it to get himself out of trouble, she'll never speak to him again. Jim takes Amy to a casino and loses all the money. The Koreans and Neville's gang intimidate Jim, threatening to kill him and administering violent beatings. Neville tells Jim that his only option is to persuade one of his students, burgeoning basketball star Lamar, to manipulate the results of an upcoming game. Jim goes back to Frank and borrows money to cover his debt; he places a huge bet on the game and wins enough money to pay Neville back, but not Frank. He calls Frank and the Koreans together and bets all his cash on a single spin of a roulette wheel; he wins, doubling his money and giving him just enough to pay off both sides.

Get Santa

United Kingdom/USA/Sweden 2014
Director: Christopher Smith
Certificate U 102m 0s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

A festive comedy wasn't a predictable next move for horror writer-director Christopher Smith (*Triangle*, *Black Death*) – but then *Get Santa* isn't typical family fare. It's set in a darker, more authentic modern world, in which the hero, Steve (Rafe Spall), is an ex-convict and Father Christmas (Jim Broadbent) is assumed to be a criminal and thrown into prison, necessitating a jail break with the help of Steve and his son. Smith draws decent comedy from the prison scenes, most notably when Santa is schooled in the art of acting tough behind bars. Broadbent gives the part his all, his character's naive idealism contrasting with the inmates' cynicism, before that itself melts under his festive spell.

Structurally, however, *Get Santa* is problematic, flitting between prison scenes, father-and-son road trip and a corny Lapland jaunt. The confused tone extends to the comedy: while certain character-based scenes work, others are overplayed. *Get Santa* functions fine as a family comedy, but it doesn't have the adult appeal that its contemporary themes might suggest. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Liza Marshall
Written by
Christopher Smith
Director of
Photography
Christopher Ross
Editor
Stuart Gazzard
Production
Designer
John Frankish
Music
Ilan Eshkeri
Production
Sound Mixer
Martin Beresford
Costume Designer
Steven Noble

©Get Santa
Productions
Limited/British
Film Institute
Production
Companies
Warner Bros
Pictures, Scott
Free Films,
Ingenious Media
and BFI present
in association
with Altitude Film
Entertainment,
Screen Yorkshire,
Chimney, LipSync
and Film i Väst a
Scott Free Films
production

A Christopher
Smith film
Produced by Fernden
Productions Limited
Fernden Santa
Limited has been
supported by
the Yorkshire
Content Fund
Made with support of
the BFI's Film Fund
Executive
Producers
Ridley Scott
Carlo Dusi
Natascha Wharton
Will Clarke
Andy Mayson
Hugo Heppell
Fredrik Zander
Norman Merry

Cast

Jim Broadbent
Santa Claus
Rafe Spall
Steve Anderson
Ewen Bremner
PC Finkerton
Warwick Davis
Sally
Stephen Graham
Barber
Joanna Scanlan
Ruth Morbury
Jodie Whittaker
Alison
Nonso Anozie

UK, the present. Getaway driver Steve comes out of prison and hopes to spend time with Tom, his nine-year-old son. Tom finds Santa Claus in the garden shed and promises to help him find his reindeer and retrieve his broken sleigh in time for Christmas. Steve is suspicious of Santa but agrees to help when Santa is imprisoned, believed to be a thief. When Steve and Tom find Santa's sleigh, Steve begins to believe that Santa is real. Guided by Santa's instructions and one of his reindeer, he finds a portal to Lapland, where he is helped by the elves. Steve and Tom fly in a sleigh to the prison, where Santa is aided in his escape by fellow prisoner Sally. The police, who are in pursuit, witness the sleigh in flight and realise that this is the real Santa; they allow him to fly off and deliver presents on Christmas Day.

The Hobbit The Battle of the Five Armies

USA/New Zealand 2014, Director: Peter Jackson
Certificate 12A 144m 16s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

To steal a line the late Gilbert Adair used more than once, I have to declare a lack of interest. Peter Jackson's JRR Tolkien adaptations are held to have been somewhere close to the centre of popular culture for 13 years now yet I have somehow managed to avoid them. Bits and bobs – people saying “precious” in a funny voice, for example – get through but their meaning and import are a mystery to me. Not having seen the earlier instalments of this saga – three *Lord of the Rings* films and the first two entries in the three-part adaptation of *The Hobbit* – is a disadvantage. But one might ask how many of the place and character names ordinary viewers of last year's *The Desolation of Smaug* will be able to recall.

At any rate, we begin in medias res, with a giant dragon – Smaug himself – napalming a small island until he takes an arrow to the chest. The division of Smaug's assets, kept in a mountain fortress, is in dispute. Bard (Luke Evans), the archer, has a case; but so do Thorin (Richard Armitage) and his band of dwarves, joined by the titular hobbit Bilbo Baggins (Martin Freeman, only nominally the lead), who have occupied the mountain. The elves also want a piece, and while they and the islanders are able to come to terms, Thorin holds out, and is still holding out when the awful orcs arrive to kill everyone. By my count that makes four armies, two (later three) of them acting in concert, but what follows is indisputably a battle.

Or slightly disputably: I am unsure whether the footsoldiers in the anti-orc alliance are meant to be automata but they certainly act like automata, making it largely a struggle of quasi-robots against monsters, at once extremely violent, almost bloodless, this being a family film, and uninvolved.

Though the main event is, as Edmund Wilson put it, “the drama of life as a showdown between Good People and Goblins”, there are questions of emphasis among the non-orcs, which are eventually resolved in favour of loyalty and love of peace and homeland, etc. – embodied in Bilbo – over greed, especially for gold. This extolling of simple völkisch virtues, not exactly free from unpleasant resonances, is queried only once, probably not intentionally, when Bilbo returns home. A simple match-cut from Martin Freeman to Ian Holm, sitting in the same chair, more moving than anything else in the film, covers his whole life between the trilogies (as it were), and conveys a rather different sense: that he enjoyed his adventure more than the simple life that followed it.

Wilson's other charge, that the books lacked “concrete reality”, applies in ways he could not have predicted to the film. The effect of 3D is to separate characters from backgrounds, as in bad back projection,

Martin Freeman



I Am Yours

Norway 2013
Director: Iram Haq

shattering the obsessively wrought illusion. More importantly, it is a ludicrously naff thing to behold, and entirely without wit. The only funny line must be unintentional: it comes when two women are seen in the same shot, possibly for the only time. What do they say? "I say we stand with our men in death – as in life." 📞

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Carolyne Cunningham Zane Weiner Fran Walsh Peter Jackson Screenplay Fran Walsh Philippa Boyens Peter Jackson Guillermo del Toro Based on the novel <i>[The Hobbit or There and Back Again]</i> by J.R.R. Tolkien Director of Photography Andrew Lesnie Edited by Jabez Olssen Production Designer Dan Hennah Music Composed by Howard Shore Supervising Sound Editors Brent Burge Jason Canovas Costume Designers Richard Taylor Bob Buck Ann Maskrey Stunt Co-ordinator Glenn Boswell Visual Effects and Animation Created by Weta Digital Ltd ©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc. (US, Canada,	New Line foreign territories) ©Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc. and Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (all other territories) Production Companies New Line Cinema and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures present a WingNut Films production Executive Producers Alan Horn Toby Emmerich Ken Kamins Carolyn Blackwood Cast Ian McKellen Gandalf the Grey Martin Freeman Bilbo Baggins Richard Armitage Thorin Oakenshield Ken Stott Balin Graham McTavish Dwalin William Kircher Bifur James Nesbitt Bofur Stephen Hunter Bombur Dean O'Gorman Fili Aidan Turner Kili John Callen Oin Peter Hambleton	Gloin Jed Brophy Nori Mark Hadlow Dori Adam Brown Ori Orlando Bloom Legolas Evangeline Lilly Tauriel Lee Pace Thranduill Cate Blanchett Galadriel Hugo Weaving Elrond Christopher Lee Saruman the White Ian Holm old Bilbo Benedict Cumberbatch Smaug/Sauron the Necromancer Mikael Persbrandt Beorn Sylvester McCoy Radagast the Brown Luke Evans Bard Stephen Fry Master of Laketown Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour [2.35:1] Some screenings presented in 3D Distributor Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)
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The events of 'The Battle of the Five Armies' follow directly from 'The Desolation of Smaug'. Smaug, a giant dragon, lays waste to Lake-town and is stopped by Bard, an archer, only after many of its inhabitants have been killed. Having witnessed the massacre from afar, Thorin Oakenshield and his band of dwarves head for Smaug's mountain, Erebor, in order to seize his gold and take possession of their ancestors' underground city. Thorin seeks in particular a magical rock that is already, secretly, in the possession of the hobbit, Bilbo Baggins. Gandalf the wizard, meanwhile, is still imprisoned in a ruined castle by the necromancer Sauron.

Bard, having organised the clean-up operation, makes for Erebor to take enough of Smaug's gold to finance reconstruction, as promised by Thorin. Thorin refuses. An army of elves joins the Lake-towners but they make common cause only after Bilbo shows them the magic rock. The elf Galadriel rescues Gandalf and sees off Sauron and his minions. Gandalf heads for Erebor to warn that Sauron has threatened to unleash an orc army. Independently, the elves Legolas and Tauriel discover that the orc army is massing.

At length, the dwarves, elves and Lake-towners unite against the orcs in a pitched battle in the valley below Erebor. Though Thorin dies in the fight, so do the orc leaders. Bilbo returns home, where he leads a quiet life until, some decades later, Gandalf knocks on his door.

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

The central character's perfunctory orgasm at the opening of Iram Haq's first feature is out-of-body for all the wrong reasons. Masturbating in semi-darkness on the carpeted floor of her flat, Mina climaxes in close-up, her face a rigid blank. It's a confronting and confident start but the film, never veering stylistically from this kind of calloused realism, gradually lets go its grip on the viewer.

Mina is a 27-year-old actress who shares custody of her young son Felix with her architect ex. The rigour of their arrangement suits him to a tee, but not Mina, who ebbs and flows and has not become another woman – abstemious, unselfish – by virtue of becoming a mother. This question of whether there's a place for a sex drive and dating in the day-to-day life of a parent is an interesting one, and rarely tackled head-on.

As Sebastián Lelio's *Gloria* (2013) so tenderly and humorously demonstrated, there is no uniformity or chapter-and-verse as to when a woman might or should be willing to forsake an active sex life; in fact, she may never be content to do so. With *Gloria*, it was the exuberance of the title character, a single woman in her late fifties, that set the tone of the film. The reverse is true of *I Am Yours*, which is relentlessly saddening in style and substance. And for Mina there is an added complication, since she, like the director, was raised by Pakistani immigrant parents. Their culture wouldn't go so far as to deny sexual appetite but doesn't approve of wanton displays of affection or flirtation in the public eye.

When Mina does find a boyfriend, Jesper, he turns out to be possibly the most egoistic individual that ever walked the earth. A filmmaker from Stockholm, he urges Mina (and Felix too, by all means) to visit him from Oslo: "Imagine if the two of you could move in with me," he casually suggests. Taking him at his word, she makes the crossing, but it's all too soon for the cavilling Jesper.

Mina isn't wayward; she just wants to *be* – a



Acting up: Amrita Acharia, Ola Rapace

mother, a lover, an actress – and her fearlessness in persevering with these things is what makes her an attractive subject. It's a shame, then, that Haq has not espoused that intrepidity in her filmmaking. Instead, *I Am Yours* is schematically, even banally, naturalistic, suffocating its heroine's high energy with hard, chalky lighting, a skinflint soundtrack and unsightly, uncommunicative locations – lorry parks, lay-bys and underpasses that dwarf the diminutive Mina.

To her credit, Haq has managed to give Mina a sense of complexity without stalling the story in the process. *I Am Yours* is an emotionally insightful film, supported by a brave lead performance, but the narrative is more or less predictable. There's nothing new, for instance, in the portrayal of Mina's obdurately traditional parents, who have made a panic-room of their belief system, one that Mina will not be imprisoned in. It's a problem that Jesper's dishonesty is palpable from the start; that we should see the sinkhole yawning beneath Mina, and tire of staring at it.

That Mina doesn't fall but in the end fills her lungs and leaps the chasm is the real surprise. It can't, however, redeem the film's monotony in the run-up. 📞

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Maria Ekerhovd Screenplay Iram Haq Cinematographers Marek Septimus Wieser Cecilie Semec Editors Anne Østerud Janus Billeskov Jansen Production Designer Ann Kristin Talleraas Composer Even Vaa Sound Recording Fanny Wadman Tor Håvard Strand Andreas Lindberg Svensson Costumes Ida Toft Lotte Shephard Ann Kristin Dahle ©Mer Film AS Production Company Mer Film presents	a film by Iram Haq Executive Producer Axel Helgeland Cast Amrita Acharia Mina Ola Rapace Jesper Rabia Noreen Samina Prince Singh Felix Trond Fausa Aurvåg Martin Assad Siddique Felix's father Tobias Santelmann Dirk Jesper Malm Simon Sudhir Kohli Mina's father Sara Khorami Felix's stepmother Usha Patel grandmother In Colour	[1.78:1] Subtitles Distributor Day For Night Norwegian theatrical title Jeg er din
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Oslo, present day. Actress Mina, a 27-year-old Norwegian-Pakistani divorcee, is struggling to find work. Swedish filmmaker Jesper asks her on a date, and they sleep together. They spend the following day together before Jesper returns to Stockholm. Later, Jesper encourages her to visit and to bring her young son Felix. When the pair arrive in Stockholm, however, Jesper becomes aggravated at having them in his apartment, and asks them to leave. On the return journey, Mina briefly loses Felix when he wanders away from the car.

Back in Oslo, Mina's mother conveys complaints she's received from the Pakistani community about Mina's sexualised behaviour. After abortive Skype-sex, Jesper proposes that he join Mina the following day. Mina drops Felix at her ex-husband's workplace, bending their custody agreement. Jesper reneges on their plan at the last minute. Mina has a dissatisfying, undignified assignation with a previous sexual partner. After Mina's parents disown her, she packs Felix's things and leaves him at his father's flat for good. She meets up with a man she picked up at a nightclub, breaking down in his arms when they kiss. Later, she looks in at her ex's window to see Felix secure in a loving family home, and walks away.

Inherent Vice

USA 2014

Director: Paul Thomas Anderson

Certificate 15 148m 35s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Like many American filmmakers of a certain age and possessed of a certain degree of artistic ambition, Paul Thomas Anderson has always had a thing about the 70s. This doesn't necessarily reflect itself in a literal way: of Anderson's seven completed features, four are period pieces, and *Inherent Vice*, based on Thomas Pynchon's 2009 novel of the same name, is only his second to take place (for the most part) in that decade, after 1997's *Boogie Nights*. The 70s, and the New American Cinema, hold a looming place as the Great Heroic Time; for younger American directors, I suspect the indie boom of the early 90s occupies a similar position. The critic Kent Jones has addressed the evolution of the 70s-as-aesthetic, memorably referring to *Little Odessa*, by Anderson contemporary James Gray, as "the result of someone being locked in a room with *The King of Marvin Gardens* on repeat". Anderson, for his part, was once earmarked as the next Altman, and has taken up the obligation that this implies to always be addressing the zeitgeist.

Like *Boogie Nights*, which followed Dirk Diggler from the blissy self-discovery of being a 70s teenager to the coke-dick hangover of the 80s, the events of *Inherent Vice* vibrate with the shockwaves of a definable cultural shift. The film is set in 1970, the year of Anderson's birth. Its protagonist, private eye 'Doc' Sportello (Joaquin Phoenix), hasn't got the memo that the counterculture thing is over: he still wears his hair long, his sideburns smother his face like an invasive climbing plant and he conducts his investigations between tokes. He is despised in a collegial way as "hippie scum" by Christian 'Bigfoot' Bjornsen (Josh Brolin), his principal contact inside the LAPD. As far as the rest of the police force is concerned, Doc is possibly a fugitive member of the Family – the name 'Manson' is dropped more than once, in spooked tones.

Dream-is-over requiems such as *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and *Shampoo* (1975) are the obvious cinematic points of comparison for *Inherent Vice*, though it put me in mind more of one of Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* movies. It has an expansive runtime, is more devoted to anecdote than incident, and every scene is cluttered with world-building details: this is film as inhabitable environment, irresistible to fans who can never have enough and, I suspect, infuriating to most others. Or maybe *Inherent Vice* won't play to the base. I haven't yet managed to appreciate Anderson's recent films – *There Will Be Blood* (2007) and *The Master* (2012) – which, for some, were confirmations of a genius attaining the height of his powers, but I was taken with the experience of *Inherent Vice* more than I have been with any film of Anderson's since *Boogie Nights*.

As ever, Anderson is over-fond of the blindsiding gesture: instead of frog storms or bowling-alley homicides, we get Bigfoot mournfully scarfing down the contents of an ashtray and gaining "stoner's ESP", and Doc performing cartoonish gape-mouthed mugging when presented with the picture of a druggie couple's screwed-up kid. Here the case of Gray, who also directed Phoenix this year (in *The Immigrant*), provides an interesting study in contrasts: Gray is the classicist, for whom



Joint enterprise: Katherine Waterston, Joaquin Phoenix

keeping an audience aware of cause and effect is a matter of accumulating ballast that will add weight to final emotional impact, while Anderson pinballs between disparate moods and styles, leaving it to us to make connections, or not. Allowing that neither approach is inherently superior to the other, Anderson's spontaneity has often seemed strained to this viewer, his weirdness over-deliberate.

Like Anderson's last two films, *Inherent Vice* sets out to distil the particular essence of a swathe of American history for the screen, but he has broken from the diptych model of those works, in which two characters and performances, full of iconic-historical implications, are placed in confrontation. There is something of this in the furry-freak/crewcut-square counterpoising of Phoenix and Brolin, but they're only two big pieces in the crazy-quilt cast – the thing *Inherent Vice* has going is its sense of always plucking at the

fringe, the conviction that the central characters aren't necessarily the most interesting ones.

Memorable supporting work comes from Martin Short as a Mad Hatter dentist wrapped up in a drug ring; Owen Wilson as a presumed-dead sax player who re-emerges as a government spook; and Katherine Waterston as Doc's ex Shasta, who sets the over-elaborate, groaning mechanism of a plot in motion in the first place. The movie has scenes that stick to the brainpan, both pungent and poignant; of the latter I'll single out Doc's reminiscence of plashing barefoot along a sidewalk in downtown Los Angeles with Shasta to the tune of Neil Young's 'Journey Through the Past', next to a vacant lot that, when next we see it, is occupied by an ominous-looking corporate HQ. Anderson's champions insist that his movies demand multiple viewings, and such exquisitely textured moments as this actually make the process seem alluring. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Joanne Sellar
Daniel Lupi
Paul Thomas Anderson

Written for the Screen by
Paul Thomas Anderson
Based on the novel by Thomas Pynchon
Director of Photography
Robert Elswit

Editor
Leslie Jones
Production Designer
David Crank
Music
Jonny Greenwood
Sound Mixer
John Pritchett

Costume Designer
Mark Bridges

@Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and RatPac-Dune Entertainment LLC
Production Companies
A Warner Bros. Pictures presentation in association with IAC Films, RatPac-Dune Entertainment
A Joanne Sellar/Ghoulardi Film Company
Executive Producers
Scott Rudin
Adam Sornner
Steven Mnuchin

Cast

Joaquin Phoenix
Larry 'Doc' Sportello
Josh Brolin
Lieutenant Detective Christian F. 'Bigfoot' Bjornsen
Owen Wilson
Coy Harlingen
Katherine Waterston
Shasta Fay Hepworth
Reese Witherspoon
Deputy District Attorney Penny Kimball
Benicio del Toro
Sauncho Smilax, Esq.
Jena Malone
Hope Harlingen
Joanna Newsom
Sortilège

Jordan Christian Hearn
Denis
Hong Chau
Jade
Jeannie Berlin
Aunt Reet
Maya Rudolph
Petunia Leeway
Michael Kenneth Williams
Tariq Khalil
Michelle Sinclair
Clancy Charlock
Martin Short
Dr Rudy Blatnoyd, D.D.S.
Sarah Pieterse
Japonica Fenway
Martin Donovan
Crocker Fenway
Eric Roberts

Michael Z. Wolfmann, 'Mickey'
Serena Scott Thomas
Sloane Wolfmann
Yvette Yates
Luz
Andrew Simpson
Riggs Warbling
Jefferson Mays
Dr Threeply
Keith Jardine
Puck Beaverton
Peter McRobbie
Adrian Prussia
Sam Jaeger
Agent Flatweed
Timothy Simons
Agent Borderline
Samantha Lemole
Golden Fang mother
Madison Leisle

Golden Fang daughter
Matt Doyle
Golden Fang father
Liam van Joosten
Golden Fang son

Dolby Digital/ Datasat
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

California, 1970. Private investigator 'Doc' Sportello is visited by his ex-girlfriend Shasta, who tells him that the wife of real-estate mogul Mickey Wolfmann, with whom Shasta is having an affair, is plotting to have her husband committed. Shasta then disappears. Snooping around one of the developer's properties, Doc is ambushed and implicated in a murder; he is questioned by his LAPD contact 'Bigfoot' Bjornsen, who tells him that Mickey has vanished. Doc learns that Mickey was making philanthropic plans to atone for his sins as a ruthless businessman. Hope Harlingen hires Doc to investigate the death of her husband, musician Coy, whom Doc discovers alive and working as

a government agent. Coy informs Doc of the existence of a drug-smuggling schooner called 'Golden Fang', part of an organisation of the same name. Doc locates the Golden Fang HQ, where he runs into Japonica, a rich runaway he'd once been hired to find. She points him towards an exclusive rehab institute, where he discovers both Mickey, who has been 'cured' of his philanthropy, and Coy. Doc follows the Golden Fang trail to hitman Adrian Prussia, whom he kills in a shootout, absconding with his stash of drugs. Doc trades the drugs back to Japonica's father in exchange for a promise to take Coy off the government payroll. Coy returns to his family. Bigfoot smokes a joint with Doc.

Into the Woods

USA 2014
Director: Rob Marshall
Certificate PG 124m 35s

Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

For all Hollywood's love of Broadway (turning shows into films and vice versa), an enduring conundrum for producers has been: how do you solve a problem like Stephen Sondheim? The *West Side Story* lyricist, Best Song Oscar-winner (for *Dick Tracy*) and enfant terrible of American musical theatre is often considered too cerebral for mass appeal, and there have been just three Sondheim-only shows adapted for cinema over five decades. Of these, only Tim Burton's *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007) struck the desired artistic and financial note. Burton may have started something, for now Disney has filmed Sondheim's dark-tinged 1986 fairytale *Into the Woods*, about a tangle of storybook characters seeking things they want in the woods, resorting to swindling to get them and learning that happy-ever-afters don't exist, as humans are forever wanting more. The first and last words sung are "I wish", and whereas wishes in fairyland frequently solve problems, here they cause them, because "wishes come true, not free".

To pull off such anti-Disney fare within Disney's walls, enter Rob Marshall. Like a modern-day Vincente Minnelli, Marshall is best directing musicals but happy handling other genres (veering from 2002's *Chicago* to 2005's *Memoirs of a Geisha*), and *Woods* looks like his reward from Disney for the billion-dollar gross of 2011's *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*.

Alongside screenwriter James Lapine (Sondheim's regular collaborator), Marshall maintains the stage production's integrity, its intricate mesh of encounters and its knowing callousness, and understandably denies us certain spectacular set pieces (such as the ball, or Jack's giants' land) so that Sondheim's songs about them can do the real storytelling. Marshall also gently tones things down (removing Rapunzel's death, reducing a sexual liaison to a kiss and leaving the wolf's predatory interest in Red Riding Hood as purely culinary).

School productions often cut the downbeat second act of *Woods* altogether to end on the

interval's (illusory) happy note of marriages and birth. Marshall, undaunted, retains it, and the tough-going final 40 minutes here are certain to test the stamina of audiences expecting the effects-laden family entertainment suggested by the film's marketing and Christmas Day US release. Marshall has likened the theme of post-disaster solidarity found in *Into the Woods* to a 9/11 fable, a parallel made uncomfortably clear by dead leaves falling like masonry dust and grieving survivors plotting revenge on their enemy.

DP Dion Beebe (an Oscar-winner for *Geisha*) brings a beautiful, timeworn semi-reality to Dennis Gassner's fantastic, tarnished sets. Costumes tend to the theatrical: Johnny Depp (enjoying his fleeting cameo) is a highly human-looking wolf dressed in Tex Avery style, while Meryl Streep's witch transforms from hag-like to a colourful glamour of the Nancy Dell'Olio kind. The ensemble cast are terrific, with standouts in Emily Blunt as the baker's wife, her mannerisms amusingly contemporary, and Chris Pine, channelling Richard Burton as Cinderella's "charming, not sincere" prince. The duet 'Agony', in which he and Rapunzel's prince give courtly love a bad name by trying to outdo each other in declarations of lovesick suffering, is a comic highlight.

The score cleanly captures the forensic precision of Sondheim's labyrinthine lyrics, his rich (rather than catchy) melodies and his analytical focus on the messy underside of human nature. The songs are performed with dramatic credibility despite the outlandish context, and cleverly staged (Red Riding Hood skips towards grandmother's house through a graveyard, musing, "For all I know she's already dead").

Even granted the craze for rewriting storybooks (*Maleficent*, the stage musical *Wicked*), this is a bold gamble from the world's chief purveyor of fairyland magic. An acquired taste, it's original, gorgeous and superbly made, drawing only a few of the show's teeth. Admirers might wish it will persuade Hollywood that Sondheim needn't belong only on stage. 🍷

Kajaki The True Story

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Paul Katis
Certificate 15 108m 17s

Reviewed by Sophia Satchell Baeza

This first feature from director Paul Katis reconstructs the real-life story of a group of British paratroopers who inadvertently found themselves trapped in a minefield in Afghanistan in 2006. While defending the Kajaki dam on the Helmand river in the midst of the conflict, a sniper patrol led by Corporal Hale (played here by Benjamin O'Mahony) set out to disable an illegal roadblock. Hale stepped into an old unmarked minefield, losing a leg in the process and setting off a treacherous rescue mission.

Kajaki: The True Story is a tense thriller with moments of quite extreme body mutilation, but it struggles to sustain its own frenetic rhythm. While comparisons to Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* (2008) are inescapable, *Kajaki* in fact has more in common with the horror film than the traditional Hollywood war story: as the soldiers edge their way gingerly around the minefield, every step potentially blowing off a limb, the film plays out like a viscerally unnerving body-horror with an invisible but omnipresent enemy.

That Katis and screenwriter Tom Williams manage to restrict the majority of the action to a small patch of land is remarkable. The slightest movement here matters, and this sense of confinement is enhanced by the painful stillness of the characters. As the mines go off one by one, the camera captures the explosions in a jerky handheld style that underlines the film's documentary-style approach – it's hardly surprising that Katis struggles to sustain these levels of tension for such an extended length of time.

Katis elicits powerful performances from a cast of mostly unknown actors in very physically demanding roles. In the face of extreme and unpredictable danger, the soldiers attempt to joke and distract themselves with talk of home, and these scenes in particular show just how hard Katis and Williams have worked to ground their film as a universal story of brotherhood and human courage. *Kajaki* is also very successful at conveying the boredom of life on base camp: the food rations, the macho camaraderie, the overwhelming heat of the sun.

A war film with very little in the way of actual warfare, *Kajaki* offers us only glimpses of enemy action from across the hill, and the narrative is stripped of obvious political

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
John DeLuca
Rob Marshall
Marc Platt
Callum McDougall
Screenplay
James Lapine
Based on the musical by Stephen Sondheim, James Lapine
Director of Photography
Dion Beebe
Edited by
Wyatt Smith
Production Designer
Dennis Gassner
Music and Lyrics by

Stephen Sondheim
Supervising Sound Editors
Renée Tondelli
Blake Leyh
Costume Designer
Colleen Atwood

©Disney
Enterprises, Inc.
Production Companies
A Lucamar/Marc Platt production
A Rob Marshall film
Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion

Picture and Television Development, Québec Production Services
Tax Credit, Ontario Media Development Corporation Film and Television Tax Credits, the British Film Commission and the UK Government's film tax relief
Walt Disney Pictures

Cast
Meryl Streep
witch
Emily Blunt
baker's wife

James Corden
baker
Anna Kendrick
Cinderella
Chris Pine
Cinderella's prince
Tracey Ullman
Jack's mother
Christine Baranski
stepmother
Johnny Depp
wolf
Lilla Crawford
Little Red Riding Hood
Daniel Huttleston
Jack
Billy Magnussen
Rapunzel's prince
MacKenzie Mauzy

Rapunzel
Tammy Blanchard
Florinda
Lucy Punch
Lucinda
Frances de la Tour
widowed giant
Simon Russell-Beale
baker's father
Joanna Riding
Cinderella's mother
Annette Crosbie
Riding Hood's grandmother

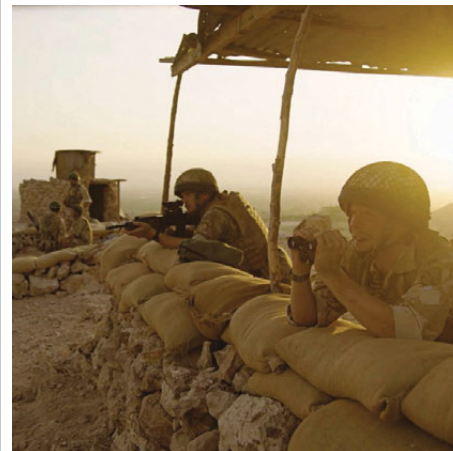
Dolby Digital
In Colour
Prints by
Fotokem

[2.35:1]

Distributor
Buena Vista International (UK)

A fairytale realm. Various characters head into the woods seeking the things they wish for. A baker and his wife seek four items a witch requires to lift their curse of childlessness. Cinderella attends the prince's festival but flees from him. Another prince rescues Rapunzel from her tower, upsetting her overprotective guardian, the witch. Jack trades

his cow for magic beans, climbs the beanstalk and, killing a giant, returns with gold. The princes marry their beloveds and the baker's wife has a child. The giant's widow wreaks destruction on the woods. Jack's mother dies in a skirmish. The baker's wife is seduced by Cinderella's unfaithful prince and falls to her death. The survivors slay the giant's widow.



Soldier to soldier: *Kajaki: The True Story*

overtones. The copious bloodshed is the result not of the recent conflict but rather a leftover Soviet landmine, a relic from an almost 30-year-old war. Such a stance is, of course, political in itself. With the masters of war noticeably absent from the story, blame falls on low-level bureaucratic mishaps. The film's ending, however, swiftly turns any supposed political agnosticism on its head. To a mawkish motivational ballad, noticeable in a film that is otherwise practically devoid of soundtrack, the soldiers' courage is celebrated in jingoistic references to fighting for queen and country.

The film's release is well timed, of course, the UK having only just shed its red poppies marking the centenary of the First World War. The end of British combat operations in Afghanistan was announced in late October, as Camp Bastion was handed over to Afghan control and UK troops flew home. *Kajaki* is dramatically executed to shock and embolden those with a connection to the conflict; for others, it also leaves a powerful, unsavoury aftertaste. This is a vision of war in stasis, with no one there to blame: a painful, pointless, universal hell. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Paul Katis
Andrew de Lotbiniere
Written by
Tom Williams
Director of Photography
Chris Goodger
Editor
Brin
Production Designer
Erik Rehl
Sound Mixer
Jon Thomas
Costume Designer
Phaedra Dahdaleh

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Production Companies
Metro International/
Alchemy Releasing
present a Pukka
Films production
in association with
LipSync Productions,
Head Gear Films,
Metrol Technology
and Bedlam Film
Productions
Executive Producers
Garreth Ellis-Unwin
Alexa Jago
Alec Mackenzie

Lee Vandermolten
Norman Merry
Peter Hampden
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross

Cast
Liam Ainsworth
DMR Andy
'Ken' Barlow
Grant Kilburn
Lance Corporal
Alex Craig
Benjamin O'Mahony
Lance Corporal
Stu Hale
Thomas Davidson
Private Chris
'Jarhead' Harvey
Paul Luebke
Private Jamie
'Jay' Davis
Jon-Paul Bell
Lance Corporal
Luke Mauro
Robert Mitchell
Fusilier Gary Farrell
Bryan Parry
Signalman
'Jonsey' Jones
Scott Kyle
Corporal Stu
Pearson
Abe Dababneh

Jon Michael 'Kajaki'
Jon 'Kranich'
Felipe Cabezas
Michael 'Kajaki'
Mike 'Vann Buholtz'
John Doughty
Private Dave Prosser
Andy Gibbins
Private Dan
'Smudge' Smith
Ali Cook
Sergeant Paul
'Spud' McMellon
Mark Stanley
Lance Corporal
Paul 'Tug' Hartley
David Elliot
Corporal Mark
Wright

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Alchemy Releasing

Afghanistan, 2006. A small unit of British paratroopers is stationed at the Kajaki dam on the Helmand river. When the soldiers spy an illegal Taliban roadblock, a three-man sniper patrol led by Lance Corporal Stuart Hale sets out to disable it. On a dried-up riverbed, Hale accidentally detonates an unmarked landmine, which blows off his left leg. Corporal Mark Wright leads a rescue mission but he and his colleagues end up trapped in the minefield. Even the slightest movement risks injury or death. Medical supplies and equipment run low and communication lines fail. After several hours, during which the men try to distract each other with talk of home and life outside the war, they are airlifted to safety. Wright dies from his wounds on the journey to hospital and is posthumously awarded the George Cross.

La Maison de la radio

France 2012

Director: Nicolas Philibert

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The primary, unavoidable thought that occurs while watching *La Maison de la radio* is how badly this cries out for Frederick Wiseman's guiding hand. It's an unfair reaction, both to what's on screen and to Nicolas Philibert, himself a veteran documentarian of decades' standing, with strong ideas about his craft. Nonetheless: what Wiseman does so well in his institutional cross-sections is to connect one sequence logically, if initially obliquely, to the next, with each successive link in the chain commenting on, amplifying and responding to what's before it.

There's no such line of argumentation in Philibert's portrait of the many moving parts of Radio France, the country's beloved public operator of seven networks. Instead, Philibert's conceit is a basic 'day in the life of' timeline, with voluminous footage roughly following a morning-to-night trajectory. The film takes its name from the behemoth home of the stations in Paris, a massive circular structure seen occasionally in exterior shots that act as measures of what time of day it is.

The building is solid and imposing enough from the outside, but its hallways trail into seeming infinity, like something from Tati's *Mon Oncle*. These are the connective tissues of a film that otherwise allows its curiosity to disperse. We take in, in no particular order, sound engineers at work, musical and literary guests holding forth, the rather becalmed taping of a radio game show, meetings to discuss the agenda for a news programme and so on, all without any obvious progression. Trips outside the station for field reports are all part of the same general blur.

Philibert largely deals in manageable two- to three- minute segments; an emphasis on classical music is the closest thing there is to a recurring motif. There are frequent references to current events, but neither the Jasmine Revolution nor Justin Bieber takes precedence in the film's presentational agenda. We learn a bit about the station's perception of itself in the Bieber discussion, when there's disagreement about whether to have a child psychologist or an actual child as the guest; the former is decided on, as being more in keeping with the station's brand. It's an argument

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Serge Lalou
Photography
Katell Dijan
Editor
Nicolas Philibert
Sound
Julien Cloquet

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ARTE France
Cinéma, Longride Inc
Production Companies
Les Films d'Ici
present a Les Films
d'Ici, Arte France
Cinéma, Longride
Inc co-production
with the participation

of Canal+, Ciné+,
Arte France
in association
with Cofinova 7
with the support
of the Région
Île-de-France
and the participation
of Centre National de
la Cinématographie
et de l'image animée
A film by Nicolas
Philibert
With the support of
the Centre National
du Cinéma et de
l'Image animée
La Région
Île-de-France,
in partnership

with the CNC
Developed in
association with
Cofinova 5 and
Soficapital
Executive Producer
Virginie Guibbaud

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Film World

A documentary portrait of the workings of numerous departments of public broadcaster Radio France.



Castles in the airwaves: *La Maison de la radio*

about self-presentation – the question of the programme's larger value is left unexamined.

One on-air interview near the beginning of the film hints at the kind of analysis that's missing. The subject is Tata Milouda, a singer/slam artist who came to France after fleeing a violent ex-husband in Morocco. She arrived without speaking French, and with "no friends, no family, no home, no papers". Having made a living through undocumented jobs, she's now a successful public figure: it's a pulled-up-by-their-bootstraps story. France's relationship to immigrants and migrant labour is one of its most vexing and urgent issues, fraught with attendant xenophobic sentiments. It's not an unexamined topic on screen by any means, with films as diverse as Aki Kaurismäki's *Le Havre* and Sylvain George's *May They Rest in Revolt (Figures of War)* among those weighing in. But Milouda's story is a standalone fragment here, and Philibert has no interest in its potential appropriations and subtext: he simply cuts to a classical pianist practising his craft and moves on, letting the issue sit. What is a public radio station for if not to examine these issues head-on? Philibert never hints at the question, and his unwillingness to diagnose what's shown is frustrating.

There is, inevitably, some fascination in seeing skilled employees complete tasks rarely documented in any detail: watching a patient call logger asking one person after another what song they want, and who they want to dedicate it to, creates a cumulative and surprisingly diverse portrait of the many people who might want to call in and request a Johnny Hallyday song for a loved one late in the evening.

La Maison de la radio ultimately has no stance on the value of the cultural institution it's profiling: it's apparently sufficient to show that it exists and demonstrate some of its interior workings. Rising and falling on the interest of its individual segments, it has a troubling lack of larger argument, a great hollowness where a perspective should be. **S**

Montana

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Mo Ali
Certificate 15 108m 23s

Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

The new film by director Mo Ali (*Shank*, 2010) is one of those gangland thrillers in which the cartoonishly hard-as-nails big boss man takes ponderous drags on a cigarette before speaking. We meet him first in Bosnia in 1995, as a corrupt paramilitary lurking in the shadows while he orders the execution of a Serbian commando's wife and son. The child is ordered to whistle while he waits for death, and this Sergio Leone-esque moment sets the tone for a revenge tale that sluices brutality and sentimentality, revelling in the violence that litters its route to redemption.

Lars Mikkelsen lends a gruff respectability to proceedings as Dimitrije, the wronged commando who later turns up in London's East End on a mission to track down the killer. In an unlikely partnership, he takes under his wing the eponymous Montana (McKell David), a teenage drug dealer whose vicious gang has turned against him. Its leader, Slavko (Zlatko Buric), is the very man Dimitrije wants to get at, and so begins a *Karate Kid*-style apprenticeship in which the world-weary Serbian trains up plucky young Montana in the art of assassination.

This makeshift father-son relationship, effectively played by Mikkelsen and David, is by far the more interesting aspect of Ali's film. Scenes with the gangsters (including Ashley Walters) and two bent cops are written and performed with the same wearying dependence on snarling profanities and macho brinkmanship; the gang's internal squabbling is so combustible, you feel Dimitrije could simply sit back and let them all destroy themselves. Nor does a budding flirtation between Montana and schoolgirl Jess (Sinead Michael) offer much ballast: Jess will provide a convenient damsel in distress in the film's climactic quarter but nothing in the way of a relationship to be cared about. As so often in the East-End crime movie, women are only paid leering lip service.



Comrade in arms: Lars Mikkelsen, McKell David

Dimitrije and Montana's bond is more properly explored, even if it rests on the silly supposition that the boy's new life as a vigilante is more righteous than his previous incarnation as a gangster's stooge. In their candlelit squat, the pair will peel carrots and listen to choral music together, and Dimitrije will lament the fact that the young choose to pack their iPods with music that's fixated on violence and misogyny. Meanwhile, the irony of training a teenager to be a crack killer is entirely lost on him.

No film about eastern European gangsters is complete without a fight in a steam room and *Montana* makes good on that eastern promise while squandering the moment with over-eager editing and the same insistent music that bedevils most of the action sequences. A finale in a warehouse similarly fails to spark the imagination: the score is settled as, one by one, the film's hot-headed hoodlums meet their comeuppance with plodding inevitability. The trigger-happy British crime movie has seen far worse than Ali's contribution but *Montana* is rote fare indeed, as impressed as its 14-year-old hero with guns and glory. Ⓢ

A Most Violent Year

Director: J.C. Chandor
Certificate 15 124m 44s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

On the strength of his first three features, writer-director J.C. Chandor seems to be shaping up as the kind of intriguingly unpredictable filmmaker who never repeats himself. *Margin Call* (2011), closely based on the meltdown of Lehman Brothers, was a scathing portrayal of the amoral fat cats of the financial world in 2008 as their greed started to topple the system. The cast-of-one, virtually dialogue-free *All Is Lost* (2013) was Robert Redford, a small boat and rather a lot of water. And now Chandor has made a crime movie of sorts, but one that – without feeling in the least derivative – harks back to Sidney Lumet films such as *Serpico* (1973) and *Prince of the City* (1981), where New York was seen as a hive of rampant corruption and endemic violence, distorting social relationships at all levels.

Chandor's new film is set in that same period since, as we're reminded, 1981 was the most violent year on record for NYC. This historical context filters into the film's aural texture, abetting the violence shown on screen: repeatedly in the background, half-heard and unattended, radios crackle out reports of shootings, stabbings, robberies and assorted mayhem. This is patently a society in crisis; and if one word links all three of Chandor's features to date, 'crisis' would be that word. For all their generic differences, each centres around a character "of ruthless individuality and self-reliance" in the director's own phrase, who finds himself up against it, forced to jettison something he saw as an essential attribute of himself in order to survive. In *Margin Call*, it's Sam Rogers (Kevin Spacey), burying his conscience along with his beloved dog; in *All Is Lost*, the unnamed sailor (Redford) abandons his prized boat; and in *A Most Violent Year*, Abel Morales (Oscar Isaac), a self-made immigrant who's built up a domestic-fuel oil company, finds his integrity surplus to requirements.

As he showed in *Inside Llewyn Davis* and *The Two Faces of January*, Isaac is singularly skilled at portraying characters at once attractive and offputting. Abel's insistence on following his own rigid morality, however admirable in the abstract, comes to seem like pig-headed conceit and a disregard for the consequences for others. In the film's final scene, having watched his wretched truck-driver Julian (Elyes Gabel) blow his brains out, he complacently reaffirms his belief in "the one path that is right", while fastidiously plugging with his handkerchief the hole that Julian's bullet has drilled in an oil tank. To compound the cruel irony, Julian started out as an eager youngster who took Abel as his role model.

For *Margin Call*, Chandor located his bankers in a hard, shiny world of glass and steel, of vast black faceless towers rearing arrogantly up into the Manhattan sky. Much of *Violent Year* similarly reflects the action: the grimy, hardscrabble terrain abutting the Brooklyn waterfront, a post-industrial wasteland full of disused warehouses, muddy unsurfaced roads and rusted railroad tracks. This scrapheap quarter contrasts with the flashily modernistic mansion that Abel and his wife Anna (a trash-blonde and seductively hard-edged Jessica Chastain) have built themselves in Westchester, but even here the dirty realities can intrude. One night Abel chases

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Gareth Maxwell
Roberts
Mark Foligno
Ian Richardson
Written by
Jeremy Sheldon
Peter Lowe
Story
Mo Ali
Peter Lowe
Director of Photography
Jean Paul Seresin
Edited by
Kim Gaster
Production Designer
Caroline Story
Music Score
Toydrum
Production Sound Mixer
Kieron Teather
Costume Designer
Raquel Azevedo

©Moli-Montana Films
Production Companies
MoliFilms presents a Moli-Montana production
A Mo Ali film
Produced by

Moli-Montana
Films on behalf of
MoliFilms Ltd
Executive Produced by
Brad Moore
Executive Producers
Babak Eftekhari
Steve Milne
Sheeva Moshiri
Robert Muston

Cast
Lars Mikkelsen
Dimitrije
Ashley Walters
Ryan
Adam Deacon
Pitt
Michelle Fairley
DCI Rachel Jones
Darrell D'Silva
Lazarus
Clint Dyer
DI Kerrigan
Rocky Marshall
West
Brad Moore
Phelps
Zlatko Buric
Slavko
McKell David
Montana

Sinead Michael
Jess

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
E1 Films

Bosnia, 1995. During the Bosnian war, Serbian commando Dimitrije witnesses the murders of his wife and son at the hands of a vicious paramilitary.

In present-day east London, orphaned 14-year-old Montana makes a living as a drug dealer in the pay of local kingpin Slavko, also known as Lazarus. He becomes friendly with schoolgirl Jess, but keeps his profession a secret from her. Two police detectives investigate a spate of murders in the underworld, though they are later revealed to be in Slavko's pay. Living in a warehouse squat, Dimitrije spies on the comings and goings at Slavko's nightclub; he suspects Slavko is the new name of the paramilitary who killed his family, and is plotting revenge.

Slavko's men attempt to kill Montana after he loses a batch of drugs but the boy is saved by Dimitrije and taken back to his home. Via one of Dimitrije's underworld contacts, Montana discovers that his father too was killed by Slavko. Dimitrije begins to train Montana in shooting and martial arts so that the two can take on Slavko and his men together.

The pair infiltrate Slavko's club and kill many of the gangster's associates. Meanwhile, the corrupt policemen and Slavko's other cronies take Jess hostage and hold her in a nearby warehouse. Dimitrije and Montana arrive at the warehouse and rescue Jess; in the resulting shootout, Dimitrije is killed. Montana dumps his arsenal of guns in the canal and returns to school.



Nobody's fuel: Oscar Isaac, Jessica Chastain

off a hitman lurking in the shrubbery, and their little daughter's birthday party is invaded by the dogged assistant district attorney (David Oyelowo) and a phalanx of cops come to search the house for evidence of fraud.

The evidence is there, too, had they known where to find it, since it turns out that Anna, with her gangster's-daughter instincts for self-preservation, has been salting away company funds. When she tells him, Abel explodes with fury but then – one right path or no – accepts the money. In this murky world no one stays clean for long; even the seemingly

straight-edge DA starts hinting that, if Abel will back his political ambitions, then maybe charges might be dropped.

In the film's eeriest moment, as Abel pursues a hijacked tanker into a disused railway tunnel, it's as if the all-pervasive darkness has become tangible and is about to engulf him. With impressive control – much aided by Alex Ebert's tense, nervy score – Chandor has created a work that, in terms of pacing, casting (Albert Brooks stands out as Abel's devious lawyer) and consistency of vision, marks him out as a filmmaker of quite exceptional potential. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Neal Dodson
Anna Gerb

J.C. Chandor

Written by

J.C. Chandor

Director of Photography

Bradford Young

Editor

Ron Patane

Production Designer

John P. Goldsmith

Music

Alex Ebert

Sound by

Steve Boeddeker

Costume Designer

Kasia Walicka

Maimone

Production Companies

An A24 release

In association with

Participant Media,

Image Nation Abu

Dhabi & FilmNation

Entertainment

A Before The Door/

Washington Square

Films/Old Bull

Pictures production

Executive Producers

Jeff Skoll

Jonathan King

Glen Basner

Joshua Blum

Kerry Orent

Cast

Oscar Isaac

Abel Morales

Jessica Chastain

Anna Morales

David Oyelowo

Lawrence

Alessandro Nivola

Peter Forente

Elyes Gabel

Julian

Albert Brooks

Andrew Walsh

Catalina Sandino

Moreno

Luisa

Peter Gerety

Bill O'Leary

Christopher Abbott

Louis Servidio

Glenn Fleshler

Arnold Klein

David Margulies

Saul Lefkowitz

Jerry Adler

Josef

Ben Rosenfield

Alex

John Procaccino

Arthur Lewis

Ashley Williams

Lange

Pico Alexander

Elias Morales

Matthew Maher

John Dominczyk

Elizabeth Marvel

Mrs Rose

Jason Ralph

Ian Thompson

Daisy Tahan

Annie Morales

Giselle Eisenberg

Catherine Morales

Taylor Richardson

Elizabeth Morales

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Icon Film Distribution

New York, 1981. Abel Morales, a self-made Hispanic immigrant, has built a domestic-fuel oil company. He strikes a deal with elderly Hasidic Jew Josef to buy a stretch of Brooklyn waterfront as a site for a terminal: 40 per cent down, the rest payable in 30 days on pain of forfeit. Abel's banker Arthur promises a loan for the balance. Abel's delivery tankers are being hijacked and one of his drivers, Julian, is brutally beaten up. Abel believes that rival fuel companies are responsible. One night he chases off an armed intruder lurking outside his house. His wife Anna, daughter of a Brooklyn criminal, offers to call on her family for help, but Abel forbids it. The assistant district attorney, who is investigating fraud in the oil industry, warns Abel that charges will be brought against his company. Abel's lawyer Andrew tells him that the drivers should be armed, but Abel vetoes it.

Julian, having recovered, returns to work. When another hijack is attempted on his truck he produces a gun and there's a shootout. Julian flees the police. The scandal causes Arthur to withdraw his loan offer. With the 30-day deadline approaching, Abel scrambles to find the money. Julian surrenders to Abel, who arranges a handover to the police, but Julian flees at the last minute. When another tanker is hijacked, Abel pursues it, catches the driver and beats information out of him; this allows him to confront one of his rivals, Arnold, and extort compensation, but he must still beg a loan from another rival, Peter, on adverse terms. Anna offers him enough to turn down Peter's loan, confessing that she's been skimming the company. Abel is outraged but accepts the money. The waterfront deal goes through. As Abel surveys his new domain, Julian arrives and shoots himself dead.

National Gallery

USA/France 2014

Director: Frederick Wiseman

Certificate 12A 180m 59s

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

We find ourselves in a new, digital golden age of non-fiction cinema. Thanks to diminished costs across the board, we now live in a culturescape where, like the one in seven East German citizens who informed for the Stasi, a ridiculous percentage of us are documenting the rest, with a vast array of machines and agendas. And we're all watching. Frederick Wiseman is something like the Methuselah prophet in this weft, a tireless, methodical monk inserting his camera into every quotidian alleyway of modern life for 47 years now, compiling a vast Alexandrian archive of the Way We Live Now – which of course has changed with the decades. Usually focusing on institutions and the subcultures that feed them, Wiseman has always neglected quirk and extravagance, looking instead at work, ageing, illness, commerce and personal catastrophe, and if the gimlet eye he used to cast on institutional madness in the 70s has mellowed considerably, that's just as natural a part of his process as showing up in the first place.

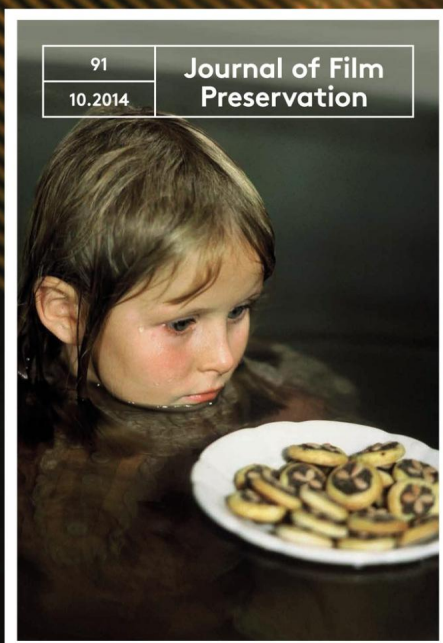
His philosophical-aesthetic approach has varied not a wit from his first launch into the void, the highly questionable and unforgettable *Titicut Follies* (1967): he takes his subjects on nakedly, straight on, without narrative, narration, talking heads or music, carefully cutting out any accidental acknowledgement of the camera's presence in the room. *Titicut Follies*, with its appalling witness of mental-patient neglect and abuse, was an extreme that Wiseman learnt to steer clear of, and his ethos became ruled by a balance between social critique and everyday mundanities, seen in films from *High School* (1968), *Hospital* (1970), *Basic Training* (1971) and *Juvenile Court* (1973) to *Racetrack* (1985) and *Public Housing* (1997).

Of course, in the best of Wiseman the two ideas are one and the same, as in *High School's* historically inconsequential but nevertheless electrifying bouts of heroic combat between pimply students and the well-meaning adults hellbent on draining them of ego. (Wiseman counterpointed this portrait 26 years later with 1994's *High School II*, a portrait of a progressive Spanish Harlem school that is inspiring and, of course, less memorable.) No other cinematic body of work has expressed with such detail the inadequacies of capitalist democracy to nurture and satisfy its citizens. That was then; as he has aged, Wiseman has been leaning towards less dramatic, more recreational-institutional arenas: Aspen ski tourism, the Miami zoo, the American Ballet Theatre, Madison Square Garden, the Paris Opera Ballet, UC Berkeley, Paris's Crazy Horse strip club, and now London's National Gallery.

With Wiseman's ostensibly hands-off approach – which feigns a capture-life-as-it-happens purity while silently assembling a subjective point of view, if not a thesis – this sometimes leaves open the question of purpose: *why* did Wiseman feel compelled to make a three-hour portrait of the National Gallery? We're used to documentaries having a pedagogical or activist itinerary, but Wiseman's have become fastidiously unpedantic – his simple Terence-like interest in what other human beings do and how they do it is more than enough. The result can be a disarming experience: sympathetically humane



Journal of Film Preservation



The *Journal of Film Preservation* is published by the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) twice a year. It offers a forum for both general and specialized discussions on all theoretical, technical and historical aspects of moving image archival activities. Articles are written in English, French or Spanish, with summaries in the other two languages.

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Night at the Museum Secret of the Tomb

USA 2014, Director: Shawn Levy, Certificate PG 97m 40s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The first of Shawn Levy's *Night at the Museum* pictures, set in New York's Museum of Natural History, was hamstrung by a personal story that weighed down its magical elements, giving inordinate emphasis to feckless father Larry Daley's attempts to be worthy in his son's eyes. The second film, which visited the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, downplayed this element in favour of fantasy action-adventure comedy business and was all the brighter for it. Here, in what seems likely to be the last of a trilogy, there's a vestigial plot thread about Larry's clash with his teenage son, who wants to take a year off before college to be a DJ in Ibiza – but even star Ben Stiller isn't all that worked up about it.

Instead, as cued by a 1938-set mummy-movie-style prologue involving the discovery of Ahkmenrah's tomb, we get a plot-convenience threat (a creeping green mould on a mystic tablet) to the existence of the magical museum creatures who populate the series. This is solved with absurd ease, despite the intervention of a misguided Sir Lancelot – and then the have-your-cake-and-eat-it ending takes both options available. The exhibits, represented by Robin Williams's Teddy Roosevelt in a manner that is inevitably now given added poignancy by the actor's death, willingly accept the loss of their magical life in order that the Macguffin remain in London and Ahkmenrah can be reunited with his parents and the other artefacts from his tomb... except that a "three years later" caption brings the tablet back to New York and revives the whole gang for an anarchic high time and victory lap from which Larry, in a peculiarly melancholy final shot, is excluded.

As signalled by the casting of Dick Van Dyke and Mickey Rooney as former nightguards, this series is a survival of the brand of fantasy-comedy that Disney once specialised in. Though there's a pleasing commitment to the educational value of museums, the point of the films is broad slapstick – a running joke about an incontinent capuchin monkey wore thin in the first film but is still trotted out here, and there's a needless secondary role for Stiller as a lookalike Neanderthal. Nevertheless, this may be the wittiest of the series. Dan Stevens steals scenes as a brash Sir Lancelot, barging in on Hugh Jackman and Alice Eve (both very funny as themselves) while they're starring in a West End performance of *Camelot*, and segues from the cartoon-hero version of the character into the more shaded, T.H. White-approved ill-made knight who nearly brings this idyll to an end.

The British Museum here is, like the museums of the earlier films, composed of a real place with added, fictional exhibits that wouldn't necessarily fit in with the institution's remit: we see the Elgin Marbles stretching and flexing as they come to life – a warrior still pounding on a centaur's head in a bas-relief – but there's also a trip into an M.C. Escher painting for some perspective jokes, a multi-headed Chinese dragon that ties one of its necks into a knot, the lions of Trafalgar Square acting like kittens in a YouTube video, and Ben Kingsley as a pharaoh who blithely admits: "We love Jews – I owned 40,000 of them." Regulars Ricky Gervais, Steve



Public view: National Gallery

and fascinating, while at the same time seeming to have no greater significance than, say, the TV documentary that we see also being shot in the Gallery, interviewing many of the same curators and restorers that Wiseman at other times observes doing their thing while they ignore his camera rolling away nearby.

The film is a suitably pensive, three-hour day trip through the museum's workings, from the front office's meetings (relentlessly vetting the budget and the endless tension between drawing in patrons and maintaining a curatorial integrity) to the behind-the-scenes work of setting up exhibits, handcarving and gilding frames, cleaning and restoring and varnishing aged works, and so on. Much of the film, however, is taken up with the museum's various public programmes, on-the-floor lectures and presentations to all age groups (including a picture appreciation session for the blind), all of which are insightful and compelling vis-à-vis the classical artworks on hand, but only just so. The Gallery's employees doggedly extol the virtues of their foundation to the museumgoer, but

Wiseman's position is, as always, ambiguous – if he has one, rather than simply an inquisitive stance towards the people as individuals on both sides of the educational divide (who remain glimpsed, unnamed and unexplored), and perhaps how the institution frames them, one to the other. (Jem Cohen's *Museum Hours*, about Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, was a more pungent homage to hypnotic museum-ness.) Draw your own conclusions, or just bask in the art, and congratulate yourself for appreciating Turner and Leonardo without necessarily being told how and why.

These swathes of the film are not at all unlike visiting the Gallery, or another huge museum, yourself; you don't need Wiseman. The backstage time, however, is entrancing, in particular a curator's detailed exegesis of the restoration process still being carried out on Rembrandt's *Portrait of Frederick Rihel on Horseback*, and how a huge printed X-ray of the picture has revealed a completely different under-painting at right angles from the finished work, and ways in which the first painting shaped the finished product. In the meantime, Wiseman's prowling camera is so unemphatically observational that you can be easily and profitably distracted by a background painting or a patch of gorgeous silk wallpaper or a particularly lovely museumgoer's face.

It's a relaxed afternoon of a film, and like Wiseman's other late films, creates through its patience and duration a dawning awareness – of how our cultural lives are manufactured for us. Even if, as in this case, the sausage factory isn't at all dismaying, the natural thrust is to recognise the bizarre gulf between the contrived, cultivated public enthrallment we demand and the unglamorous, nitpicky and sometimes anxious work required to create it. Even the National Gallery is, to some degree, an artifice. This is not a fiercely new or profound realisation but it's a valid dimension that the TV programme we see being shot in the same halls will surely omit.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Frederick Wiseman
Photography by
John Davey
Editor
Frederick Wiseman
Sound
Frederick Wiseman

©Gallery Film LLC,
Idéale Audience
Production
Companies

A film by Frederick
Wiseman
A Gallery Film LLC
and Idéale Audience
co-production
National Gallery has
been supported by
Canal +, Planète
+, Centre National
du Cinéma et de
l'image animée, LEF
Moving Image Fund,
Utah Film Center

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor
Soda Pictures

A documentary tour, without narration or text, of the National Gallery in London, showing famous paintings, lectures and classes, workshops, restoration efforts, janitorial work, business meetings and throngs of visitors.



Pharaoh trade:

Coogan and Owen Wilson extend their schtick, sometimes to good effect, and Rebel Wilson joins the gang as a London night-guard who falls for the Neanderthal doppelganger. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Shawn Levy
Chris Columbus
Mark Radcliffe
Screenplay
David Guion
Michael Handelman

Story

Mark Friedman
David Guion
Michael Handelman
Based on characters
created by Thomas
Lennon, Robert
Ben Garant

Director of

Photography
Guillermo Navarro

Film Editor

Dean Zimmerman

Production

Designer
Martin Whist

Music by/Score

Conducted by
Alan Silvestri

Sound Mixer

Chris Dueterdiek

Costume Designer

Marlene Stewart

Visual Effects

MPC

Method Studios

Digital Domain

CineSite

Iola | VFX

Zoic Studios

@Twentieth

Century Fox Film

Corporation and

TSG Entertainment

Finance LLC

Production

Companies

Twentieth Century

Fox presents a 21

Laps/1492 Pictures

production

A Shawn Levy film

In association with

TSG Entertainment

With the

participation of the

Province of British

Columbia Production

Services Tax Credit

Executive

Producers

Mary McLaglen

Josh McLaglen

Dan Levine

Michael Barnathan

David Guion

Michael Handelman

Cast

Ben Stiller

Larry Daley/Laaa

Robin Williams

Teddy Roosevelt/

voice of Garuda

Owen Wilson

Jedediah

Steve Coogan

Octavius

Ricky Gervais

Dr McPhee

Dan Stevens

Sir Lancelot

Rebel Wilson

Tilly

Skyler Gisondo

Nick Daley

Rami Malek

Ahkmurah

Patrick Gallagher

Attila

Mizuo Peck

Sacajawea

Andrea Martin

Rose, archivist

Ben Kingsley

Merenkahre,

Ahk's father

Rachael Harris

Madeleine Phelps

Matt Frewer

Archibald Stanley

Dolby Atmos

Colour by

Technicolor

[1.85:1]

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

Paddington

France/United Kingdom 2014

Director: Paul King

Certificate PG 95m 5s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

The makers of the big-screen *Paddington* have obviously taken to heart the famous request from his Aunt Lucy: "Please look after this bear." This charming and confident reimagining of Britain's beloved ursine immigrant is deeper and larger than the original tales of domestic scrapes, but retains Paddington's essential qualities: curiosity, indefatigable courtesy and "an alarming marmalade habit". Writer-director Paul King has made a rather freer adaptation than producer David Heyman's Harry Potter series allowed with that other fiercely cherished hero of British children's books. Yet it's just as carefully transposed, and even shares some Potter DNA, most noticeably in its cosy-but-thrilling view of Heritage Britain and childhood adventures.

Introducing an overarching jeopardy story, in which Paddington is hunted down by a revenge-crazed woman taxidermist (a hint of *101 Dalmatians*, or *Madagascar 3*) is King's biggest, and riskiest, gambit. Since it's served up with wit, energy and Nicole Kidman's deadpan dominatrix Millicent Clyde, he justifiably gets away with it.

Interlacing the peril with beefed-up versions of the comic set pieces familiar from the books (Paddington wrecking a bathroom or accidentally apprehending a pickpocket) makes the film feel a little episodic, however, betraying King's background in TV sketch shows. The physical comedy bleeds into Kidman's bear-napping action sequences (there's a lovely *Mission Impossible* running gag), usefully reducing their scarier elements for small children. It's a film pitched as heightened, playful realism rather than the surrealism of King's first feature, *Bunny and the Bull* (2009).

King is careful to have the cast play his comedy drama absolutely straight, without the winking self-reflexiveness often found in live-action/CGI character hybrids such as *Garfield* or *Alvin and the Chipmunks*.



As Mr and Mrs Brown, the couple who take Paddington in, Hugh Bonneville and Sally Hawkins are as key to making the skilfully rendered CGI Paddington feel real as Ben Whishaw's soft, empathetic voice work. This Paddington banishes the teddy-bear feel of Ivor Wood's 70s TV cartoons (where Paddington was, perversely, the most real character in a paper world). He's an anthropomorphic take on a real bear, albeit one with old-fashioned English manners. To underline his bearishness, the film introduces an engagingly absurd Peruvian jungle backstory that may alarm Paddington purists. Its sweetly sad prologue adds a poignant touch to Paddington's plight – finally, we get to see what he's homesick for.

Rather as the Harry Potter film franchise mined an exportable heritage view of Britain (film scholar James Russell noted its visual nods to Dickens, Gormenghast et al), *Paddington* creates a sparkly, retro-modern multicultural London, full of pastel stucco houses, pavement calypso bands and twinkling landmarks. There's also a Potter-like taste for English eccentricity and photogenic heritage in the spooky final chase scenes at the National History Museum, all dinosaurs and gargoyles.

What's being pushed most heavily, however, is a sense of tolerance and fair play. *Paddington* has an unabashedly pro-migrant message, rewarding Aunt Lucy's hope that the British, who took in wartime evacuees, "will not have forgotten how to treat a stranger". Unafraid to take on a big theme, the script has some pointed fun with bigoted neighbour Mr Curry, anxious about "jungle music" and streets potentially overrun with bun-throwing bears, picnicking at all hours. When the Brown family finally

declare solidarity with Paddington, the film demonstrates a generosity of spirit that's both cheering and utterly consistent with Michael Bond's original creation. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

David Heyman

Written by

Paul King

Screen Story

Hamish McColl

Paul King

Paddington

Bear created by

Michael Bond

Director of

Photography

Erik Wilson

Editor

Mark Everson

Production Designer

Gary Williamson

Music

Nick Urata

Production

Sound Mixer

Danny Hambrook

Costume Designer

Lindy Hemming

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S.A. TF1 Films

Production S.A.S.

Production

Companies

Studiocanal presents

in association

with Antoin Capital

Entertainment

in co-production with

TF1 Films Production

with the participation

of Canal+ Ciné+

TF1 and Amazon

Prime Instant

Video a Heyday

Films production

Executive Producers

Bob Weinstein

Harvey Weinstein

Olivier Courson

Ron Halpern

Rosie Alison

Jeffrey Clifford

Alexandra Ferguson

Cast

Hugh Bonneville

Henry Brown

Sally Hawkins

Mary Brown

Julie Walters

Mrs Bird

Jim Broadbent

Mr Gruber

Peter Capaldi

Mr Curry

Matt Lucas

Joe

Kayvan Novak

Grant

Madeleine Harris

Judy Brown

Samuel Joslin

Jonathan Brown

Michael Gambon

voice of Uncle

Pastuzo

Imelda Staunton

voice of Aunt Lucy

Nicole Kidman

Millicent Clyde

Ben Whishaw

voice of Paddington

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

London, present day. A Geographers Guild newsreel shows talking bears discovered in Peru. Forty years later, Paddington Bear's uncle Pastuzo is killed in a Peruvian earthquake; Paddington's elderly aunt Lucy sends him to London as a stowaway. In London, the Brown family reluctantly take him in.

Paddington and Mr Brown sneak into the Geographers Guild and find film of Paddington's family, taken by explorer Montgomery Clyde, who might give Paddington a home. Taxidermy expert Millicent Clyde tracks Paddington down, helped by the Browns' neighbour, Mr Curry. Attempts to snatch Paddington fail, and cause an explosion. Paddington runs away. Searching for 'M. Clyde', he is captured by Millicent and trapped in the Natural History Museum. Millicent's father was ruined by his failure to return with a specimen of a talking bear; she plans to stuff Paddington as proof of her father's theories. Mr Curry repents and tips off the Browns. They break into the museum to save Paddington, who escapes by climbing a lift shaft. On the roof, Paddington surrenders to Millicent but Mrs Bird, the Browns' housekeeper, knocks Millicent down on to a flagpole, saving him. Millicent is sentenced to community service in a petting zoo. The Browns ask Paddington to live with them permanently.

Paper Souls

Belgium/Luxembourg/France 2013
Director: Vincent Lannoo

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

"Call me when you get rid of your ghosts," beautiful widow Emma (Julie Gayet) tells the rumpled and self-pitying Paul (Stéphane Guillon), when the night they've spent together appears to promise no follow-up. The fact that she and Paul met when she asked him to write a private eulogy for her son about his dead father means that loss has already loomed large between them – but little does Emma realise how accurate she's being. Paul is at this point harbouring the actual ghost of her dead husband Nathan in his apartment, as well as remaining figuratively haunted by his own deceased wife. Meanwhile Paul's eccentric elderly neighbour Victor spends his time obsessively searching for physical mementos of his brother, killed in the Holocaust.

The first third of Vincent Lannoo's charming but rather overdecorated film is all formulaic but skilfully assembled romcom. Its most pleasurable moment comes when all that has been set up is thrown to the winds in favour of a metaphysically baffling and emotionally confounding swerve into supernatural fantasy, which is handled with a bluntness that makes it oddly believable. After this switch of realities, however, the film loses some of its self-assurance, apparently not quite knowing how to contain the confusion it has unleashed upon its characters, or how to balance the resulting large emotions with the light comic tone it has established.

Charmingly though Guillon plays befuddlement and bemusement, rather too much screen time is spent on him running around not knowing what to do next. Meanwhile Jonathan Zaccai as Nathan is landed with a character who appears to the audience as a romantic third wheel even though he has the prior claim – and who doesn't really have a personality, because he can't remember who he is. Caught between these two, the radiant Gayet does an excellent job of bringing



Afterlife goes on: Julie Gayet, Stéphane Guillon

emotional authenticity to Emma's plight.

As if to put the anguish of one bereaved wife into the sort of perspective that makes it seem fair game for romcom hijinks, the film gives us a redoubtable emotional reference point, in the form of the Holocaust. This is a risky narrative addition to a slight structure already supporting considerable supernatural weight; with its inclusion, the film risks either taking itself far too seriously or not taking the Holocaust seriously enough, with the consequence that the reference comes off as mawkish and out of place.

Arguably, however, emotional awkwardness is part of the film's considerable charm. Like its lived-in hero, it lumbers from feeling to feeling with a clumsiness that can be rather delightful. Its major issue is that it hasn't quite established what every successful supernatural narrative needs – a cohesive set of rules for how its imagined afterlife operates. A few narrative tweaks could make for a persuasive Hollywood star vehicle – and with vampires and zombies surely outstaying their pop-culture welcome, couldn't ghosts be due for a new lease of life? ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Patrick Quinet
Claude Waringo
Serge Zeitoun
Original Screenplay
François Uzan
Cinematography
Vincent van Gelder
Editor
Frédérique Broos
Art Director
Véronique Sacrez
Original Music
Gast Waltzing
Sound Recordist
Marc Thill
Costume Designers
Florence Scholtes
Christophe Pidrè

©Artémis Productions, Samsa Film, Liaison Cinématographique, Nord-Ouest Films, RTBF
Production Companies
Artémis Productions, Samsa Film, Liaison Cinématographique present a co-production between Artémis Productions, Samsa Film, Liaison Cinématographique In co-production with Nord-Ouest Films, RTBF (Télévision

Belge), Belgacom With the assistance of Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and of VOO With the participation of Fonds National de Soutien à la Production Audiovisuelle du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg In association with Tax Shelter Films Funding, Casa Kafka Pictures, Casa Kafka Pictures Movie Tax Shelter empowered

by Belfius, Cofinova 9 With the participation of La Wallonie et de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, Ciné+, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée With the support of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral de Belgique, Programme Media de la Communauté Européenne, Procrep Developed in association with Cofinova Développement

Puissance 4 with the support of Fonds de Garantie MEDIA pour la Production financée through the European Union and IFCIC
Executive Producer
Stéphane Quinet

Cast
Stéphane Guillon
Paul
Julie Gayet
Emma
Jonathan Zaccai
Nathan
Pierre Richard

Victor
Jules Rotenberg
Adam
Claudine Baschet
Hortense
Alain Azerot
Ousmane

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Swipe Films

Belgian theatrical title
Les Âmes de papier

Paris, the present. Suffering with writer's block since the death of his wife Florence five years ago, novelist Paul makes a living penning funeral eulogies for strangers. A client recommends him to Emma, a widow who wants him to write something to help her young son Adam come to terms with the death of his father Nathan, a photographer who was killed by a mine during a trip to Mauritania. Adam continues to shut down when his father is mentioned, but he and Paul become friends; Paul and Emma sleep together. Soon afterwards, Nathan's ghost appears at Paul's door, in safari gear and remembering nothing. Paul contacts Ousmane, the

guide who was with Nathan when he dies; Ousmane has photographs which prove that Nathan definitely died, and tells Paul that in Mauritania, ghosts are believed to return when unfinished business binds them to the living. Against Paul's advice, Nathan presents himself to Emma and Adam, claiming never really to have died, and attempts to re-establish a life with them – but the memories that begin to surface for him are from Paul's life with Florence, not his own with Emma. Paul realises that he too must let go. When Paul says goodbye to Florence and accepts his love for Emma, and Nathan says goodbye to Adam, Nathan's spirit departs for good.

Pelo malo

Venezuela/Peru/Argentina/Germany 2013
Director: Mariana Rondón

Reviewed by Maria Delgado

For 15 years now the filmmakers Mariana Rondón and Marité Ugás have been making incisive political cinema with their Caracas-based company Sudaca Films. While they co-directed *At Midnight and a Half* in 1999, their habitual practice involves alternating producer and director roles on each other's work. Their most recent collaboration sees Rondón as writer-director on a beautifully realised coming-of-age tale set in Caracas against the backdrop of Hugo Chávez's deteriorating health. Fevered news bulletins show locals shaving their hair in empathy and tell of the 'sacrifice' by a local man of his mother, murdered in the hope of saving the ailing president.

Evangelism is manifest not only in the tone of the news items but also in the Marxist slogans that litter the streets and the animated religious meetings witnessed by the film's nine-year-old protagonist Junior in his neighbour's apartment.

Pelo malo (*Bad Hair*), winner of the Golden Shell at San Sebastian in 2013, is a film about intransigent ideologies refracted through a tale of mother love, misunderstanding and the need to belong. Junior doesn't fit into his frayed mother Marta's ideas of masculinity: she wants him to act like a *varón* (male), cut off his curly Afro hair and stop his dreamy dances (which contrast with the agitated breakdancing of the tougher neighbourhood boys). Marta resents his difference, and shows him little affection. She snaps at him incessantly, rebukes him for his tender glances and even tells him off as his scrawny legs peek out from below the cubicle door of a public toilet, remarking, "Men don't sit down to pee." The policing of behaviour begins at home: Junior speaks to his infant brother with the same disdain.

Indeed, the film shows the cyclical patterns of oppression that operate in the microcosm of the family and the society beyond. Marta bullies her son but she in turn is exploited by the security agency that contracts her. She sleeps with potential employers to secure a job with a minimum wage, no benefits and no liability insurance in the case of an accident. "What if I get shot?" she asks a contractor. He wonders why anyone would want to shoot at her, a reply that rings hollow in a film where the sound of gunshots is as common as the deafening noise of the oppressive traffic. *Pelo malo* never confirms how Junior's father met an early death but the implication is that some sort of gun crime was involved.

The film presents Caracas through Junior's eyes: queues at the bus stop, overcrowded pavements, endless lanes of congested traffic, graffiti-strewn walls, and a broadcasting culture where beauty-queen pageants vie with official news bulletins promoting slavish Chavismo. The tiny windows that peer out from the compressed units of Junior and Marta's decaying social housing estate offer a soured vision of Le Corbusier's utopian living: unkempt exteriors, cramped conditions, menacing walkways. Junior and his diminutive friend and neighbour Niña ('Girl') play respectively with tiny plastic soldiers and dolls; she says that she would rather die than be raped by one of his toy soldiers. And as they play on a merry-go-round, she informs Junior that she

Penguins of Madagascar

USA 2014

Directors: Eric Darnell, Simon J. Smith
Certificate U 91m 42s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The DreamWorks Animation/Pacific Data Images juggernaut has grossed \$1.2 billion worldwide since its inception, producing in-house veterans and internal franchises along the way. This latest film is co-directed by Eric Darnell, who also co-helmed the *Madagascar* films, and Simon J. Smith, who graduates from the less successful *Shrek 4-D* and *Bee Movie*; both have climbed the studio's rungs since its beginnings. Spun off as leading characters from the *Madagascar* trilogy, undisciplined pseudo-military penguins Skipper, Kowalski, Rico and Private have already had their lead-role appeal extensively road-tested in a series of shorts and, since 2008, a TV show.

The plot has the penguins defending their kind against mad scientist Octavius Brine (John Malkovich) – actually an octopus with the fearsomely unthreatening name Dave, a mirthful incongruity of the kind that typically helps corporate cartoon fare go down more smoothly. Fast without being frantic, *Penguins* puts its expensive budget (\$132 million) to good, visible use: a gondola-versus-gondola chase through Venice is clever and inventive enough to achieve near-delirium, and the globetrotting narrative is lushly rendered without resort to gross stereotypes. There are fine sight gags and decent jokes acting in concert throughout, one of which (it involves a cake-making octopus and a Kevin Bacon pun) is too complicated to explain out of context. Incongruous soundtrack tie-in cues are limited to the end credits, and heavy winking allusions for adults are cleverer than usual. What a bar to clear, but it's easily superior to the *Happy Feet* films and the awful *Ice Age* franchise, its wretched competitors in the winter-weather-animal animation subgenre. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Lara Breay
Mark Swift
Screenplay
Michael Colton
John Aboud
Brandon Sawyer
Story
Alan Schoolcraft
Brent Simons
Michael Colton
John Aboud
Editor
Nick Kenway
Production Designer
Shannon Jeffries
Music
Composed by
Lorne Balfé
Sound Design/ Sound Supervisor
Paul N.J. Ottosson
Animation Supervisor
Jamaal Bradley

@DreamWorks Animation LLC.

Production Companies
Twentieth Century Fox
DreamWorks Animation
Executive Producers
Tom McGrath
Mireille Soria
Eric Darnell

Agent Classified
Ken Jeong
Short Fuse
Annet Mahendru
Eva, owl
Peter Stormare
Corporal, polar bear
John Malkovich
Dave, 'Dr Octavius Brine'
Andy Richter
Mort
Danny Jacobs
King Julien

Voice Cast

Tom McGrath
Skipper
Chris Miller
Kowalski
Christopher Knights
Private
Conrad Vernon
Rico
Benedict Cumberbatch

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

After breaking into Fort Knox, rogue penguins Skipper, Kowalski, Rico and Private are abducted by octopus Dave. Once a star attraction at Central Park Zoo but displaced in favour of the foursome, Dave plans to abduct the world's penguins and turn them into monsters. With help from the North Wind, a mixed-animal commando squad, the penguins track Dave to New York, where they reverse the effects of his monstrous serum.



Curl afraid: Samuel Lange

is keen to leave the neighbourhood because she doesn't want to be raped: it's a telling comment on a society where she, like Marta, is expected to function as a pliant plaything for macho males.

Unsurprisingly, this society is governed by appearances, and otherness is disparaged. Marta admires the logo on the new security guard uniform, a status symbol that explains her unwillingness to accept further employment as a cleaner; Niña yearns for a Photoshopped photograph as Miss Venezuela, shaped by the female ideal – Barbie-doll looks and docile smiles – promoted in the TV beauty pageants she avidly consumes; and Junior is encouraged by a local photographer to pose as an 'action man' child soldier, complete with red beret, fatigues and large rifle. Marta's brutal insistence that Junior cut his hair may also be a comment on a society where Afro-Caribbean is seen

as an inferior other to European heritage.

Cinematographer Micaela Cajahuaringa, a regular collaborator of Rondón's, proffers a gritty documentary style that complements Samuel Lange Zambrano and María Emilia Sulbarán's unmannered performances as Junior and Niña. Songs such as Henry Stephen's cheery 1960s hit 'Mi limón mi limonero' and Tepeyac Usto's 2012 'Sólo ida' are deftly deployed to provide different rhythms to punctuate the action, allowing the space for Junior to dance to a beat that accommodates both the past and the present. At the end of the film, the shorn Junior looks bereft but defiant. The hair may be gone but the gaze is bold, rebellious and firm. His fellow pupils may slavishly sing out the national anthem but Junior's silence suggests that he, much like Rondón in this impressive film, is not quite ready to toe the party line. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Marité Ugás
Written by
Mariana Rondón
Director of Photography
Micaela Cajahuaringa
Editor
Marité Ugás
Art Director
Matías Tikas
Music
Camilo Froideval
Sound Design
Lena Esquenazi
Costume Designer
Marisela Marin

@Sudacafilms
Production Companies
Sudaca Films
in co-production with
Imagen Latina, José

Ibáñez, Artefactos
SF, La Sociedad Post,
Hanfgarn & Ufer
Filmproduktion
World Cinema
Fund- Berlinale
with financial
support of The Global
Film Initiative
Centro Nac
Autónomo de
Cinematografía
Programa IBERMEDIA

Cast

Samuel Lange
Junior
Samantha Castillo
Marta
Nelly Ramos
Carmen,
grandmother
María Emilia

Sulbarán

Niña
Beto Benites
boss
Luis Domingo
Gonzalez
doctor
Martha Estrada
neighbour
Julio Mendez
Mario
Ali Rondón
neighbour

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Axiom Films

UK publicity title
Pelo malo (Bad Hair)

Caracas, Venezuela, the recent past. Nine-year-old Junior lives with his recently widowed mother Marta and his baby brother on a social housing estate. Marta hopes to return to her earlier job as a security attendant. Junior craves a photograph for his school yearbook in which his hair is straightened. Junior and his mother do not have an easy relationship – she wants him to be less concerned with his appearance. She takes Junior to a doctor for a check-up, equating his effeminate ways with illness. His grandmother Carmen purports to understand him and offers to pay Marta so that he can move in with her. Junior argues with his grandmother over an outfit she has made for him; returning home he fights with his mother when she finds that he has put mayonnaise in his hair to help straighten it. Marta gives Junior an ultimatum: if he wants to continue living with her he must shave his head. At the end of the film a shorn Junior stands in the school playground alongside his fellow pupils, who are reciting the national anthem.

Point and Shoot

USA/United Kingdom/Denmark 2014
Director: Marshall Curry

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

An easy rider becomes a rebel with a cause in *Point and Shoot*, a documentary portrait painted in broad strokes by director Marshall Curry. Certainly the story of Matthew VanDyke, a Baltimore native whose apparent quarter-life crisis prompted him first to take a motorcycle trip across northern Africa and then to fight in 2011 alongside Libyan insurgents, is promising: hearing that this formerly rootless college kid basically tried to turn himself into T.E. Lawrence to prove his masculinity is oddly funny—especially since by filming his adventures, he was also attempting to be a handycam version of David Lean.

Curry's film isn't satirical, however. Instead, it implies that VanDyke, who was captured as a prisoner of war and held in solitary confinement for six months, is a genuine hero both for shooting images of revolution and for taking up arms for a cause not his own. Instead of examining the intersection of its subject's activism and his narcissism, Curry indulges the latter to the point where the political situation in Libya becomes secondary to VanDyke's self-actualisation: a happy ending pasted over a conflict that's far from over. Leaving aside the fact that the subject's own ruminations about his adventures are at best intermittently articulate, Curry's filmmaking is disappointingly rote, right down to the nudging, emotional music cues from American indie band The National. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Marshall Curry
Elizabeth Martin
Matthew VanDyke
Written by
Marshall Curry
Cinematography
Matthew VanDyke
Alan Jacobsen
Edited by
Marshall Curry
Original Music
James Baxter
Supervising
Sound Editor/
Re-recording Mixer
Christopher Barnett

©Marshall Curry
Productions
Production
Companies
Marshall Curry
Productions, LLC
presents a Marshall
Curry film
A co-production
of Marshall Curry
Productions and
American
Documentary/POV,
and The Independent
Television

Service (ITVS)
with funding
provided by the
Corporation for
Public Broadcasting
(CPB)
in association
with the BBC and
Matthew VanDyke
and BBC
Supported by
Cinereach, Danish
Broadcasting
Corp, Guci Tribeca
Documentary
Fund, Influence
Film Foundation
and New York State
Council on the Arts
A Marshall Curry
Productions,
LLC film
Executive Producer
Vijay Vaidyanathan
Film Extracts
Lawrence of
Arabia (1962)
World Safari (1977)
Escape World
Safari III (1988)

In Colour

Distributor
Kaleidoscope
Entertainment

A documentary about Matthew VanDyke. Inspired by Australian adventurer and filmmaker Alby Mangels, American university graduate VanDyke travels by motorcycle from Morocco to Afghanistan, filming each step of the journey. He files dispatches for a Baltimore newspaper and in 2011 befriends members of the guerrilla contingent opposing Muammar Gaddafi; after joining the resistance, he's taken prisoner and held for six months. On his release, he continues to fight for a time, before returning to the US to participate in the making of this documentary.

The Pyramid

Director: Grégory Levasseur
Certificate 15 88m 46s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

An essay in faux-found-footage horror, *The Pyramid* often needs to break the strictures of the format for an objective establishing shot (including one of a satellite in Earth orbit) or to set up a cheap shock. Nevertheless, it is stuck with a lot of found-footage tics: the underground labyrinth that dupes unwary trespassers into crawling and running around in circles is simply a hieroglyph-decorated version of the Paris catacombs of *As Above So Below* (2014).

An older strain of pulp is on offer in serial-style death traps, which include the chamber that fills up with sand and the ever-popular pit of stakes, while the final monster (who seems to conflate jackal-headed Anubis with the minotaur) is the sort of creature that turned up in *Weird Tales* in the 1930s (cf. 'Imprisoned with the Pharaohs', ghostwritten by H.P. Lovecraft for Harry Houdini). A game cast, including Denis O'Hare (*True Blood*, *American Horror Story*) and James Buckley (*The Inbetweeners*), can do little with characters who are at each other's throats needlessly even before the peril starts.

There has already been a micro-budget found-footage Egyptology horror movie (*Day of the Mummy*, which is rubbish but at least has a good mummy) so this can't even claim that modest innovation. **S**



The twaddle of the sands: *The Pyramid*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Alexandre Aja
Mark Canton
Chady Eli Mattar
Scott C. Silver
Written by
Daniel Meersand
Nick Simon
Director of
Photography
Laurent Tangy
Editor
Scott C. Silver
Production
Designer
Marco Trentini
Music
Nirna Fakhara
Sound Mixer
Matthew Sanchez

Costume Designer
Essouci Zakia

Production
Companies
Twentieth Century
Fox presents a
Fox International,
Silvartar Media,
Aja/Levasseur
production
Executive
Producers
Robert O. Kaplan
Alfred S. Newman
Justine Raczkiewicz

Cast
Ashley Hinshaw
Dr Nora Holden

Denis O'Hare
Miles Holden
James Buckley
Terrence 'Fitzie'
Fitzsimmons
Amir Kamyab
Michael Zahir
Christa Nicola
Sunni Marsha

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

Egypt, 2013. Given only hours to evacuate the site of a newly discovered buried pyramid because of civil unrest, archaeologist Professor Holden and his daughter Nora approve the use of a robot probe to explore the structure. When the expensive robot is damaged, the Holdens, tech support Zahir, TV journalist Sunni and cameraman Fitzie venture into the pyramid. The party suffer losses thanks to deadly traps and feral cats, and discover the god Anubis still confined in the tomb, waiting to weigh their torn-out hearts in order to decide their worthiness to pass into the afterlife. All the explorers are killed.

The Rendlesham UFO Incident

United Kingdom 2013, Director: Daniel Simpson
Certificate m s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Daniel Simpson filmed his found footage aliens-in-the-woods/horror hybrid *The Rendlesham UFO Incident* from April 2011 to December 2012. Shooting took place in six- to eight-week segments, with the cast tramping through the woods and heavily improvising in response to new cues. This extensive shooting and rethinking yielded no results. *The Rendlesham UFO Incident* is the very model of a bad *Blair Witch* imitation cashing in on the post-*Paranormal Activity* gold rush in the found footage idiom: low investment, guaranteed return from indiscriminately omnivorous genre fans.

Danny Shayer and Robert Curtis form the two male points of a triangle around Abbie Salt; the three having decamped to Rendlesham Forest to search for long-buried treasure, it's clear encounters with things that go bump in the night will do nothing to unfray their relationships. Rendlesham is a perpetual bugaboo for the UFO-minded, the site of a series of ostensibly unsolved sightings et al. in December 1980. *The Rendlesham UFO Incident* begins with audio from the "British Roswell" over a black screen, the fuzzy audio more latently menacing than anything following. Jumping 33 years later for the narrative proper, it seems briefly possible that an unsettled perspective in the admittedly atmospheric woods might offer some jolts. *The Rendlesham UFO Incident's* first big scare comes from a stray deer, whose stomping entrance and exit in nightvision is seemingly clumsily punched up on the Foley track in the hopes of inducing a jolt. The trio bicker and whine before and after a spectacularly under-rendered UFO invasion, following which there's a predictably grim discovery about the nature of the extraterrestrial invaders. The camera sways throughout, trailing aimlessly through the woods in anticipation of scares that never come. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Laurie Cook
Jason Newmark
Will Clarke
Paul Higgins
Written by
Daniel Simpson
Adam Preston
Director of
Photography
Daniel Simpson
Editor
Andrew Hulme
Masa Skalec
Incidental Music
& Additional
Sound Design
Andrew Hulme
Visual Effects
Lipsync Post

presentation
in association with
LipSync Productions
A Bigscope Films/
Newscope Films
production
A Newscope Films
production
in association with
LipSync Productions
Developed and made
with the support of
the BFI's Film Fund
Executive
Producers
Peter Hampden
Norman Merry
Andrew Boswell

Robert Curtis
Gus

In Colour

Distributor
Altitude Film
Entertainment

©HID Films Limited
Production
Companies
An Altitude Film
Entertainment
Cast
Danny Shayer
Jake
Abbie Salt
Sally

Suffolk, the present. Three friends arrive in Rendlesham Forest to search for gold. After encountering a series of strange lights and noises, they clearly see alien ships hovering overhead. Further exploration leads them to the invaders' base in the forest, where they discover dead bodies and more ships. Two of the friends are killed; the last offers himself up for abduction.

Rurouni Kenshin Kyoto Inferno

Japan 2014, Director: Otomo Keishi
Certificate 15 138m 29s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Judging by online comments, there's a faction of fans who think it's pointless to review the live-action *Rurouni Kenshin* films as anything other than adjuncts to their source, the epic Japanese comic strip by Nobuhiro Watsuki. Certainly the sword-swinging *Rurouni Kenshin* trilogy (of which *Kyoto Inferno* is the second part) seems geared to the fans, who can add in the extra narrative and thematic substance that the films leave out.

As a sequel to 2012's first *Rurouni Kenshin* film, which shared the same director (Otomo Keishi) and star (Sato Takeru), *Kyoto Inferno* is simply more of the same. Set in 19th-century Japan, it's a handsome, well-framed period adventure, full of extras, costumes and cultural detail. At the same time it seems needlessly stretched, with a great many fights but little to ground the action emotionally or historically. Moreover the battles, while impressively choreographed, often lack much sense of physical contact or danger. The youthful, androgynous Sato, who was regularly upstaged in the first film, has a little more presence here.

The film cuts off at a cliffhanger leading into the third film, *Rurouni Kenshin: The Legend Ends*, with no reward for the viewer except 'To Be Continued'. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Fukushima Satoshi
Screenplay
Fuji Kyomi
Otomo Keishi
Based on the
original comic
Rurouni Kenshin by
Nobuhiro Watsuki
Director of
Photography
Ishizaka Takuro
Edited by
Imai Tsuyoshi
Production
Designer
Hashimoto Sou
Music
Sato Naoki
Recording by
Masuko Hiroaki
Yomogita Tomokazu
Action Director
Tanigaki Kenji

©'Rurouni Kenshin
Kyoto Inferno'
Film Partners
Production
Companies
Warner Bros.
Pictures Japan
presents in
association with
'Rurouni Kenshin
Kyoto Inferno'

Film Partners
A Warner Bros.
Pictures Japan
production
Executive Producer
Koizumi Hiroyoshi

Cast
Sato Takeru
Himura Kenshin
Takei Emi
Kamiya Kaoru
Iseya Yusuke
Shinomori Aoshi
Aoki Munetaka
Sagara Sanosuke
Aoi Yu
Takami Megumi
Fukuyama
Masaharu
Seijuro Hiko
Eguchi Yosuke
Saito Hajime
Fujiwara Tatsuya
Shishio Makoto

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Warner Bros
Distributors (UK)

Japanese
theatrical title
Ruroni Kenshin
Kyoto Taika-hen

Japan, 1878. Former warrior and assassin Himura Kenshin enjoys a peaceful life in the dojo of heiress Kamiya Kaoru. Government representatives ask him to stop Shishio Makoto, a former government assassin who was betrayed by his masters and seeks violent revenge. Kenshin travels to Kyoto, fighting his way through Shishio's allies, the Ten Swords. Kaoru follows him, as does Kenshin's headstrong friend Sagara. Kenshin and his allies stop Shishio's forces burning Kyoto, but Kenshin realises that Shishio's true target is Tokyo. In a fight on Shishio's warship, Kenshin and Kaoru fall into the sea; Kenshin washes ashore, alive.

Selma

United Kingdom/USA 2014
Director: Ava DuVernay



Marching on together: Tessa Thompson, Corey Reynolds, David Oyelowo, Colman Domingo

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Save for Sidney Lumet and Joseph L. Mankiewicz's exhaustive, Oscar-nominated documentary *King: A Filmed Record... Montgomery to Memphis* (1970), the famed American civil-rights leader Martin Luther King Jr has been strangely under-represented in the cinema. Ava DuVernay's excellent third film thankfully puts this continued omission right, by focusing on King's involvement in the three Selma to Montgomery marches of 1965, which ultimately led to the passage that same year of the Voting Rights Act, a crucial piece of legislation prohibiting racial discrimination in voting. (The act, which remained untouched for nearly 50 years, was effectively bowdlerised in a controversial Supreme Court decision in June 2013.) *Selma* also arrives at a spectacularly fraught time in contemporary American race relations: there have been widespread recent protests about the consecutive non-indictments of two white policemen who killed unarmed black American males – in Ferguson, Missouri, and Staten Island respectively – and further outrage at the police killing of a 12-year-old boy in Cleveland, Ohio. This unfortunate confluence renders the film's sharply detailed dialogue on the process and psychology of

civil-rights activism all the more urgent.

Selma begins with King's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in Norway in 1964, then cuts, jarringly, to a hauntingly ethereal rendering of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, an act of racist domestic terrorism in which four little girls were killed. After the dust has settled, a third scene tracks the stymied attempt of future activist and sheriff-puncher Annie Lee Cooper (Oprah Winfrey) to register to vote in a courthouse. This bracing opening salvo elegantly sets forth the stakes and strata of the domestic situation. Following a prickly discussion between King (David Oyelowo) and the liberal yet intransigent President Lyndon Johnson (Tom Wilkinson), who refuses to bow to pressure to sign the Voting Rights Act into law, King makes the decision to relocate to the staunchly segregationist Selma with his civil-rights organisation the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); here, argues King, is the perfect stage for a provocative campaign of non-violent direct action.

The ensuing narrative assumes an intensely procedural quality. In the chamber-like sequences set among King's inner circle, the punchy dialogue of British screenwriter Paul Webb is at its strongest, illuminating the

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Christian Colson
Music
Jason Moran
Sound Mixer
Willie Burton
Costume Designer
Ruth E. Carter
Written by
Paul Webb
Director of
Photography
Bradford Young
Edited by
Spencer Averick
Production Designer
Pathe and Harpo

Mark Friedberg
Music
Jason Moran
Sound Mixer
Willie Burton
Costume Designer
Ruth E. Carter

Films present
a Plan B/Cloud
Eight Films/Harpo
Films production
in association with
Ingenious Media
An Ava DuVernay film
Completed with
assistance from
the Georgia Film,
Music & Digital
Entertainment Office
A Plan B

Entertainment, Cloud
Eight Films and Harpo
Films production for
Pathe and Redgill
Selma Productions
Executive Producers
Brad Pitt
Cameron McCracken
Diarmuid McKeown
Nik Bower
Paul Barnes
Ava DuVernay
Nan Morales

Cast
David Oyelowo
Dr Martin Luther
King Jr
Tom Wilkinson
Lyndon B. Johnson
Carmen Ejogo
Coretta Scott King
Giovanni Ribisi
Lee White
Alessandro Nivola
John Doar
Cuba Gooding Jr

Fred Gray
Tim Roth
George Wallace
Oprah Winfrey
Annie Lee Cooper

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Pathe Productions Ltd

USA, 1965. In response to President Lyndon Johnson's reluctance to sign a Voting Rights Act – which would ensure full enfranchisement for African-Americans – Martin Luther King and his organisation, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), relocate to Selma, Alabama, in order to plan a large-scale march down the 54-mile highway to the state capital of Montgomery. Alabama governor George Wallace instructs local troops to come down hard on protesters; at a night march, a policeman murders

a black man, Jimmie Lee Jackson. The SCLC and their supporters embark on their first march, which is brutally suppressed by law-enforcement officers. On a second march, the troopers step aside to let the marchers pass; King, fearing a trap, leads the marchers back to the church. On the third and final march, the protesters (now a multiracial group made up of participants from across the nation) successfully make their way to Montgomery. President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act into law on 6 August 1965.

complexity of mobilising and organising protesters, as well as the movement's internecine struggles (King's methods of non-violent direct action were volubly questioned by younger, more radical activists). Balancing out the activism is a series of intimate domestic scenes between King and his wife Coretta (the excellent, understated Carmen Ejogo) in which cinematographer Bradford Young's skill at lighting black actors comes to the fore. Throughout, DuVernay composes with a clean, classical style, but she films the many scenes of crowd violence with an unflinching eye. The trio of fraught showdowns on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, meanwhile, are beautifully shot and choreographed, charged with a palpable energy that marries the mythical and cinematic with a powerful sense of reality.

One of *Selma's* central strengths is its insistence on presenting a three-dimensional version of King. He is a figure too often blandly sanctified (like Gandhi) in public discourse, or posited as a peaceful, neatly binary alternative to the firebrand Malcolm X. He's complex and alive here, and incarnated wonderfully by Oyelowo, who gives a resolutely unflashy performance: serene but capable of fear, doubt and even anger, most thrillingly in the animated speech following the police murder of protester Jimmie Lee Jackson.

Selma is also refreshingly clear on the depths of the state's nefarious activities, not just the obvious racism peddled by the likes of maniac sheriff Jim Clark (Stan Houston) or snarling Alabama governor George Wallace (Tim Roth). Instead, institutional malaise is ingeniously woven into the very texture of the film. Consider the scene in which a troubled, insomniac King dials in to request a lullaby from the great gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. It's a beautiful moment that should soar – and briefly does – but its wings are clipped by a caption, noisily battered out on screen in typewriter style, informing us that the exchange has been logged by the FBI. This formal device recurs throughout, operating simultaneously as a clever marker of time and space for the viewer and a constant reminder of the institutional state surveillance visited on King and cohorts by J. Edgar Hoover (archly essayed by an oddly cast Dylan Baker).

Whereas the narrative of Lee Daniels's civil-rights epic *The Butler* (2013) concluded with the election of President Barack Obama in 2008 and came dangerously close to presenting this exceptional event as a panacea for America's racial anomie, *Selma* brooks no such fantasy – a decision that proves particularly wise in the light of current events. DuVernay couldn't possibly have known that the release of her film would coincide with arguably the worst year for American race relations in recent history, but fate has made it so. Fortunately, *Selma's* granular hardness not only safeguards it against accusations of triumphalism but also affords it the feel of a vital activist statement in a moment of severe social discord. It's a testament to both the specificity and timelessness of DuVernay's vision that her film doesn't require the Ferguson-referencing end-credits song, by rapper Common and soul singer John Legend, to feel entirely relevant. 📌

Son of a Gun

Australia/New Zealand/Canada/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Julius Avery

Certificate 15 108m 49s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Over the past few years, Australian cinema has delivered a number of bold, impressive debut features: Justin Kurzel's *Snowtown* (2011) was a memorably disturbing addition to the true-crime genre, while this year's *The Babadook*, an eerie, affecting horror, heralded Jennifer Kent as a filmmaker of real ingenuity. *Son of a Gun*, which brashly serves up a veritable mixtape of crime-movie tropes, is too derivative and overstuffed to qualify as a comparable triumph, but it's clear from the outset that its confident first-time writer-director Julius Avery is an authentic talent. His story of a wayward youth being mentored by a none-too-saintly father figure – a theme lately given a bracing workout in David Gordon Green's *Joe* – feels very familiar, as do the signposted conflicts and betrayals embedded in the plot. But while there's minimal depth to the characters, Avery's brawny handling means that the pace rarely flags, even as the macho clichés stack up.

Suggesting a desire on Avery's part to throw in everything but the kitchen sink for his debut, *Son of a Gun* begins as a brutal prison flick, with echoes of everything from TV's *Oz* to *A Prophet* (2009), before morphing into something more akin to a slick hybrid of gangland saga and underworld caper. Its central protagonist is 19-year-old JR (played a little vacantly by Brenton Thwaites), who is inexplicably installed in a maximum-security jail to serve a six-month stretch. In prison he bonds with notorious lifer Brendan (a lip-smacking Ewan McGregor) over their mutual chess skills, the game a blunt metaphor for the battle of wits to follow. Saved from a predatory rapist by Brendan, JR enters into a Faustian contract with the older man, vowing to repay the debt on the outside. This ultimately entails breaking Brendan out, a set piece featuring helicopters and heavy weaponry that Avery stages with bruising finesse. But having passed this initiation, JR starts to wonder how much Brendan's king views him as an expendable pawn to be manipulated.

The Michael Mann of *Heat* (1995) seems a



Tough house: Baroo, Nable, McGregor

crucial influence in this mid-section – a couple of scenes nod directly to that film, as when a volatile thug's paranoia almost ruins an intricately rehearsed robbery. But in Avery's case, it's perhaps a Mann who might have been up all night playing *Grand Theft Auto*. Avery is most assured in the bravura action sequences, the best of which is a gold heist that – instead of happening amid the gleaming steel of yet another bank or casino – takes place in the arid desert near the mining town of Kalgoorlie. The downtime in between can resemble the scripted cut-scenes from a *GTA*-like videogame: characters never feel fully three-dimensional, despite the shifting loyalties at play. Alicia Vikander has a particularly thankless job as Tasha, an underwritten gangster's moll who dutifully enters into a risky dalliance with JR. But there are consolations along the way: a witty farewell to a fallen cohort is shot like a Viking funeral, the corpse sent off a ravine in a flaming car ("Where you're going, there's no parole," eulogises Brendan); another bizarrely comic scene has JR given impromptu ballistics training by an ecstasy-addled raver. And extra credit should go to Jed Kurzel (brother of *Snowtown's* Justin) for his outstanding, hypnotic score.

It's sometimes riveting, ultimately shallow hokum – not the great crime film Avery aspires to, but an eye-catching calling card nonetheless. 📌

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Timothy White
Written by
Julius Avery
Additional Material
John Collee
Director of Photography
Nigel Bluck
Edited by
Jack Hutchings
Production Designer
Fiona Crombie
Music
Jed Kurzel
Sound Recordist
Trevor Hope
Costume Designer
Terri Lamera

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Production Companies
Screen Australia, ScreenWest, Lottery West and Screen NSW

present in association with Media House Capital, Daydream Productions Limited, Hopscotch Entertainment One and Altitude Film Sales a Southern Light Films production in association with Bridle Path Films & WBMC
Executive Producers
Aaron L. Gilbert Clayton Smith James Dean John Collee Michael Spiccia Aidan O'Bryan Richard East Bryce Menzies

Cast
Ewan McGregor
Brendan Lynch
Brenton Thwaites
JR

Alicia Vikander
Tasha
Jacek Koman
Sam Lennox
Matt Nable
Sterlo
Tom Budge
Josh

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Koch Media

Australia, present day. Jailed for six months for a minor crime, 19-year-old JR wins the respect of feared career criminal Brendan Lynch. Brendan rescues JR from a predatory inmate but asks that the favour be repaid once JR is out. On release, JR is assigned by crime lord Sam to help break Brendan out of prison. The mission is successful, with both Brendan and another convict, Sterlo, freed. JR conducts a secret affair with Sam's unhappy girlfriend Tasha. Sam has Brendan mastermind a gold-bullion heist, but an ensuing police shootout leaves Sterlo dead. Suspicious of Tasha, Sam sends a hitman after her. She escapes, warning JR and Brendan that Sam intends to betray them. Brendan coerces Sam's nephew into revealing that Sam plans to trade the gold with Russian mobsters. Brendan and JR intercept the deal, absconding with the cash. Brendan kills Sam. JR and Brendan become suspicious of each other's motives. Sailing out to sea with JR, Brendan – knowing JR can't swim – demands he leaves the boat. JR reveals that he has given half the loot to Tasha and hidden Brendan's cut. During a fight, JR falls overboard but is saved by Brendan. JR elopes with Tasha. Brendan is apprehended and jailed, but a letter from JR reveals the location of his money.

A Tale of Samurai Cooking A True Love Story

Director: Asahara Yuzo
Certificate U 121m 55s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Period-drama *jidai-geki* are not exactly an endangered genre in Japanese culture, but far fewer are made these days – even for television – than they were in the 1960s-1990s. And those that do get made tend to steer away from *chambara* swordplay; macho action movies like Miike Takashi's remake of *13 Assassins* are the exception, and even Toei – the most macho-oriented of all Japanese production companies – has begun making female-centric movies. Shochiku has been known for targeting the female audience since the 1930s, and so *A Tale of Samurai Cooking* represents a reassertion of the company's core identity. It contains no swordplay at all (there's one brief glimpse of *kendo* practice) and purports to tell the "true story" behind the compilation of the recipe-book *Ryori Mugon-sho*, produced in the 18th century by the Funaki family and noted in Japan to this day. The film's Japanese title *Bushi no Kondate*, incidentally, means 'A Warrior's Menu'.

Like many other modern *jidai-geki*, the film combines pedantic historiography (delivered as narration by a reassuringly authoritative male voice) with soapy domestic drama. The 'history' component of the package centres on the previously neglected role of 'kitchen samurai' (that is, clan chefs) – with a dynastic succession in the Kaga Clan and the suppression of an internal uprising against conservative elders in the background (that is, largely offscreen). The 'soap' component centres on Haru (Ueto Aya), an improbably feisty and self-assured young woman who has survived the loss of her parents in a fire and a failed marriage into a family that would not accept her 'impertinence' and now finds herself challenged to steer an immature young man, her second husband, away from his fantasies of martial martyrdom and towards his manifest destiny as a celebrity chef. The plotting sets out to integrate the two strands, using modern pop-psychology to keep the central characters moving in the right direction.

There's an unbridged chasm between the film's desire to get the history right – careful art direction, recipes taken directly from the old book – and its need to present the characters as easily grasped modern types. That's why we get a father giving his adult son basic lessons in the samurai code, which the boy would in fact have started learning in the cradle, and why the son turns into a touchy-feely 'new man' much given to hugging the wife he once spurned. Maybe it's also why the final reconciliation between the now penitent husband and his self-sacrificing wife takes place with distinctly Celtic music on the soundtrack?

The confidence to breeze through egregious anachronisms and cross-cultural thefts must come as second nature to director/co-writer Asahara Yuzo, who learnt such tricks in his years as assistant to Shochiku's consummate hack Yamada Yoji; he went on to direct the last seven episodes in the 20-film series *Free and Easy*, masterminded by Yamada as a replacement for his own long-running *Tora-san* series. The only mystery is why filmmaking-by-numbers like this reaches British distribution when sparkier, more original and vastly more appealing Japanese films don't. 🍣



A fly in your soap: Kora Kengo

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Ishizuka Yoshio
Miyoshi Hideaki

Screenplay

Asahara Yuzo
Kashiwada Michio
Yamamura Yukiko

Director of

Photography
Okimura Yukihiko

Editor

Ishijima Kazuhide

Production

Designer
Harada Tetsuo

Music

Iwashiro Taro

Production

Companies
A Tale of Samurai
Cooking Film
Partners, Shochiku
Studio

Cast

Ueto Aya
Funaki Haru
Kora Kengo
Funaki Yasunobu
Yo Kimiko
Funaki Mitsuru
Nishida Toshiyuki
Funaki Dennai

Nakamura

Masatoshi
narrator

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Yume Pictures

Japanese
theatrical title
Bushi no kondate

Edo, the 1740s. Headstrong divorcee Haru is in the service of Lady Tei, concubine of Maeda Yoshinori, the sixth Lord of Kaga. After revealing her expertise in culinary matters, Haru is persuaded by the Kaga Clan's 'kitchen samurai' Funaki Dennai to marry his only surviving son Yasunobu, who is more a would-be warrior than a cook. She moves to Kanazawa, where Yasunobu lives with his mother, and starts helping her new husband with his cooking. Yasunobu (who lost his childhood sweetheart Sayo when he became his father's heir) resents Haru's help and allies himself with a group of young Kaga retainers who plot to safeguard Yoshinori's financial reforms; the group is led by Otsuki Denzo, Lady Tei's secret lover. In 1745 Yoshinori dies. Otsuki and Lady Tei are arrested and the plotters (including Yasunobu's 'kendo' teacher Sadanoshin) are driven into hiding. Maeda Shigehiro is appointed the new Lord of Kaga. When the plotters move to assassinate clan elders during a hunt, Haru runs off with her husband's swords to prevent him from joining them. Dennai, laid low by a heart tremor, sends Yasunobu and Haru to research new dishes from every part of the Kaga domain and uses their findings to prepare the lavish banquet with which Shigehiro cements a new, stable relationship with the shogunate. The dinner is a great success, but Dennai and Yasunobu return home to find that Haru has left. Yasunobu eventually finds her in a fishing village and persuades her to return as his wife.

Testament of Youth

United Kingdom/Denmark 2014
Director: James Kent
Certificate 12A 129m 36s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Like Tomas Alfredson's recent film of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, James Kent's adaptation of Vera Brittain's WW1 memoir *Testament of Youth* faces competition in the form of a fondly remembered BBC TV drama series from 1979. And, again like Alfredson's film, Kent's new version withstands the comparison extremely well.

The five-part BBC series, scripted by Elaine Morgan, starred Cheryl Campbell, who gave a luminous, deeply felt performance as Vera. Now Swedish actress Alicia Vikander (*A Royal Affair*, *Anna Karenina*) rises to the challenge, capturing Vera's po-faced moments along with her sense of fun, and sporting a near-flawless English accent. (The occasional flattened vowel might hint at Scandinavia but could equally suggest Vera's home territory of Derbyshire.) She's well matched by Kit Harington (Jon Snow in *Game of Thrones*) as her fiancé Roland Leighton, his confident good looks tempered by a touch of petulance and underlying vulnerability. Altogether the film is cast from strength, with notable supporting roles from Dominic West as Vera's father, doing his bemused best to fathom his fiercely independent daughter, Hayley Atwell as the strong-minded but compassionate matron who takes Vera under her wing in France, and a frizzy-haired Miranda Richardson enjoyably sardonic as a Somerville don.

Brittain's 'Autobiographical Study', as she termed it, was first published in 1933, just as the threat of war was starting to darken Europe again, and came to stand for the experience of a whole generation of young women during the 1914-18 war, much as Robert Graves's 'Good-Bye to All That' did for her male contemporaries. Brought up in a comfortable but conventionally stuffy Buxton household, Brittain was on the threshold of a new and liberating world, having been accepted for Oxford despite educational shortcomings and parental misgivings, when war broke out. During the course of the catastrophic conflict she lost not only Roland but also her brother Edward and her two closest male friends. Putting her academic career to one side, she volunteered as a nurse, working in England, Malta and finally just behind the front line in Etaples, and it was this, as much as her personal losses, that brought home to her the slaughter and misguided futility of the war.

Screenwriter Juliette Towhidi (*Calendar Girls*) takes a few liberties with Brittain's original. Vera's nine months stationed in Malta are elided, she nurses Edward back to health in France, not in London, and she meets her future husband George Catlin much sooner than really happened. But these are minor adjustments, effectively tightening up the flow of the film. More significant, and exceptionally well judged, are certain scenes that expand on brief remarks in the book. The last time Vera and Roland were together was in August 1915, when he came home on leave. They spent a few days at his family's home on the Suffolk coast and Roland, Brittain recalled, "seemed to hold himself deliberately aloof from me". In the film this becomes a painful scene on the beach, where Vera's attempts at affection run headlong into Roland's curt rejection, and she realises – as do we – the degree of emotional cauterisation that he's



A turn for the nurse: Kit Harington, Alicia Vikander

imposed on himself in order to endure the unspeakable horrors of the trenches.

Of the trench warfare itself we see little: a Paul Nash-style landscape of gaunt bare trees, a few mud-encrusted soldiers turning harrowed eyes towards us. For the most part the war is transmitted through what Vera sees and hears, which is as it should be; this is her story, after all, and it's her reactions, her growing emotional and political awareness, that carry the action. (Vera isn't given a voiceover narrative, but the script quotes extensively from her letters, capturing the ardently self-questioning intimacy of her telling.)

Director Kent, a TV documentary-maker here making his feature debut, puts himself

unostentatiously at the service of the story, only once allowing his fluid camera a stylistic flourish. As the wounded from the Battle of the Somme (Edward among them) start to arrive at the field hospital at Etaples, the camera rises from the front of the hut, lifts over the roof and steadily higher as we're shown row upon row of gassed, shattered bodies lying on stretchers. There's a nod here, surely, to the classic Atlanta crane shot in *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

The centenary of WWI has already brought a spate of books, films and TV programmes, and there'll be plenty more. In its intelligence, poignancy and dramatic impact, *Testament of Youth* has set a high standard to match up to. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

David Heyman
Rosie Alison

Screenplay

Juliette Towhidi

Based on the

memoirs of

Vera Brittain

Director of

Photography

Rob Hardy

Edited by

Lucia Zucchetti

Production Designer

Jon Henson

Music

Max Richter

Production

Sound Mixer

John Pearson

Costume Designer

Consolata Boyle

@Testament

Distribution Limited,

British Broadcasting

Corporation and The

British Film Institute

Production

Companies

BBC Films, Heyday

Films, Screen

Yorkshire and BFI

present in association

with Hotwells

Productions, Nordisk

Film Production

and Lipsync

Developed by

BBC Films

Testament Films

Limited has been

supported by Screen

Yorkshire through

the Yorkshire

Content Fund

Made with the

support of the

BFI's Film Fund

Executive Producers

Christine Langan

Joe Oppenheimer

Hugo Heppell

Zygi Kamasa

Richard Mansell

Cast

Alicia Vikander

Vera Brittain

Kit Harington

Roland Leighton

Taron Egerton

Edward Brittain

Emily Watson

Mrs Brittain

Hayley Atwell

Hope Milroy

Colin Morgan

Victor Richardson

Joanna Scanlan

Aunt Belle

Alexandra Roach

Winifred Holtby

Jonathan Bailey

Geoffrey Thurlow

Anna Chancellor

Mrs Leighton

Nicholas Le Prevost

Mr Leighton

Nicholas Farrell

headmaster

Dominic West

Mr Brittain

Miranda Richardson

Miss Lorimer

Henry Garrett

George Catlin

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Lionsgate UK

London, 11 November 1918, Armistice Day. Young volunteer nurse Vera Brittain wanders through the rejoicing crowds, overwhelmed by memories.

Derbyshire, 1914. Twenty-year-old Vera goes swimming with her younger brother Edward and their friend Victor. Back at the house, the boys' school friend Roland Leighton shows up. Vera, planning to become a writer, argues with her father that she should be allowed to apply to Oxford. Edward backs her up and Mr Brittain finally gives in. Vera passes the entrance exam and is accepted for Somerville College; her excitement is compounded by the knowledge that Roland, to whom she's increasingly attracted, will also be at Oxford.

August 1914. War is declared. Roland and Edward join up, though Victor is turned down on health grounds. With the numbers of deaths and casualties

mounting daily, Vera puts her academic career on hold and volunteers for nursing duty in London; the work is hard and gruelling. Roland and Vera become engaged. They plan to marry on his next leave at Christmas 1915, but he's fatally wounded the day before he's due to travel home. Victor is accepted for active service. He receives a head wound that blinds him. Vera agrees to marry him but he dies in hospital. She transfers to a hospital in France, where she nurses Edward, who's been wounded. He recovers and is sent to the Italian front, where he's killed in action. Vera nurses badly wounded German prisoners, becoming increasingly convinced of the futility of the war.

With the war over, she returns to Oxford, gains her degree and becomes active as a committed pacifist, hoping to end war for ever.

Trash

United Kingdom/Brazil/Germany/The Netherlands/USA 2014

Director: Stephen Daldry

Certificate 15 113m 43s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

During an urgent early scene in Stephen Daldry's *Trash*, Wagner Moura's municipal aide-turned-messianic whistleblower tosses a coveted wallet into a passing garbage truck, beyond the reach of the brutal cops closing in on him. Moura will be familiar to some viewers as the bilious, zero-tolerance lawman Captain Nascimento from José Padilha's *Elite Squad* saga, the second instalment especially of which depicted Rio de Janeiro – and by extension all Brazil – as a festering cauldron of corruption, from profligate top to hardscrabble bottom. *Trash*, adapted by Richard Curtis from Andy Mulligan's young-adult novel, is similarly upfront in painting a murky picture of the lopsided metropolis and its compromised institutions. But the brush is broad: colours are bright, sentiments easy and the rather simplistic view of individuals on disparate social strata tends towards the Manichean. Daldry (*Billy Elliot*, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*) and Curtis have made a professionally crafted, energetic David-vs-Goliath thriller that – despite being predominantly in subtitled Portuguese and boasting the firsthand experience of Mulligan, a former volunteer and overseas English teacher – remains something of a crowd-pleasing outsider's vision.

The film's structure resembles a classic quest narrative, which begins when a trio of favela teens – the resilient Raphael (Rickson Tevez), goofball Gardo (Eduardo Luis) and sickly Rato (Gabriel Weinstein) – discover the dumped wallet on the vertiginous trash heap on which they toil, week in, week out. Inside, a locker key leads to a scrawled set of numbers and a jailed lawyer who turns out to have been in cahoots with José Angelo (Moura) to bring down crooked mayoral candidate Santos (Stepan Nercessian, in both appearance and performance recalling a similar character in Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan*); somewhere in the city lies hidden the means to do just that. Meanwhile, Santos orders a cold-blooded police inspector to sniff around the favela for clues – one uncharacteristically gritty sequence sees the cop attempt to 'disappear' Raphael after singling him out.

Daldry's continuing knack with young, unestablished actors is *Trash*'s major strength: the three first-timers are all excellent, Tevez in particular adding a level of nuance that isn't overt in Curtis's script. (One of the film's smartest formal moves is to punctuate the action regularly with the kids' direct-to-camera narration, these addresses ultimately forming the web video created to spread their story to the world.) In support, there are thin slivers of roles for Martin Sheen and Rooney Mara, as a jaded but benevolent priest and a tech-savvy English teacher respectively. The dynamic chase sequences, frequently slathered with booming Brazilian hip hop, are staged with pacy finesse, Daldry channelling the busy kineticism of Danny Boyle (particularly *Slumdog Millionaire*) as Adriano Goldman's camera darts nimbly around the favela's rooftops, stairwells and balconies. Elsewhere, the images can seem a little over-lustrous: the lakeside favela is strikingly designed but should it look as cosy, nay inviting, as it does? Credibility also frays in later plot

The Turning

Australia 2013
Directors: various
Certificate 15 106m 48s



Pennies from heaven: Rickson Tévez, Eduardo Luis

developments – one revelation seems to be heading into ill-advised magic-realist territory only to become doubly risible when it doesn't. And when pains have been taken to emphasise the widespread rot of Rio, you certainly need a very sweet tooth indeed to indulge the pie-in-the-sky conclusion as anything other than a fantasy. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Directed by Stephen Daldry Directed by (Brazil) Christian Duurvoort Produced by Tim Bevan Eric Fellner Kris Thykier Written by Richard Curtis Based on the novel by Andy Mulligan Director of Photography Adriano Goldman Editor Elliot Graham Production Designer Tulé Peak Music Antonio Pinto Production Sound Mixer Paulo Ricardo Nunes Costume Designer Bia Salgado	Produções Artísticas E Cinematográficas/ Universal Pictures Productions GmbH/ Universal Studios International B.V. Production Companies Universal Pictures presents a Working Title production in association with O2 Filmes and PeaPie Films Executive Producers Bel Berlinck Andréa Barata Ribeiro Fernando Meirelles Amelia Granger Liza Chasin	Gabriel Weinstein Rato Martin Sheen Father Julliard Rooney Mara Olivia Wagner Moura José Angelo Selton Mello Frederico Stepan Nercessian Antonio Santos Nelson Xavier João Clemente Maria Eduarda Lima Botelho Pia Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Part-subtitled Distributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
Cast Rickson Tévez Raphael Eduardo Luis Gardo		

Rio de Janeiro, present day. José Angelo, an aide to corrupt mayoral candidate Antonio Santos, flees from police. Before being caught and later killed during interrogation, he throws a wallet in a garbage truck. Favela kids Raphael and Gardo find the wallet, which contains a key, on a trash heap. Police inspector Frederico offers the favela a reward for the wallet's return. Another kid, Rato, identifies the key as one used for a station locker. The locker yields a set of numbers and a letter addressed to jailed lawyer João Clemente. Detained by the suspicious Frederico, Raphael narrowly escapes execution. Gardo visits Clemente, who reveals the numbers are a code that can be decrypted using the Bible. A flashback shows Angelo stealing a vast hoard of bribe money from Santos, plus a ledger listing illegal transactions. Pressured by Santos, Frederico has the favela torched. Raphael, Gardo and Rato decipher the code, which leads them to a cemetery and the crypt of Angelo's daughter, Pia. However, Pia appears alive, her death having been faked by Angelo. Frederico corners the kids and has them break open the crypt, which contains Santos's loot. Frederico is disarmed but Raphael spares his life. From the trash heap's summit, the kids shower the favela with Santos's cash. A web video of the boys telling their story goes viral; the leaked ledger sends Santos to prison.

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

This compilation of Australian shorts, based on a book of stories by Tim Winton, arrives in cinemas in its third incarnation, having first been released in 2013 as a three-hour epic consisting of 18 different stories before being cut down to eight for broadcast on Australian television. There are nine stories in this new edit and they don't entirely overlap with the broadcast cut.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Robert Connolly Maggie Miles Created by Robert Connolly Based on the book by Tim Winton Editor Andy Canny End Credits Music Composer Stephen Rae Sound Supervisor Paul Pirola	Production Company Produced by Studio Balloon narrator Colin Fries Reunion Director Simon Stone Production Companies Arenamedia and Screen Australia present in association with The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Film Victoria, ScreenWest, Lotterywest, Melbourne International Film Festival Premiere Fund Produced in association with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Financed in association with Fulcrum Media Finance Produced with the financial assistance of the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) Premiere Fund With the assistance of ScreenWest and Lotterywest Developed and produced with the assistance of Film Victoria Principal development and production investor Screen Australia Executive Producers Andrew Meyer Paul Wiegard	Production Company Produced by Arenamedia Ash Wednesday Directed by Marieka Walsh Written by Marieka Walsh Based on the poem by T.S. Eliot Music Elliott Wheeler Animator Marieka Walsh	Cast Hugo Weaving Bob Lang Josh McConville Vic Lang The Turning Director Claire McCarthy Producers Maggie Miles Sue Italiano Writer Claire McCarthy Director of Photography Denson Baker Editor Beckett Broda Production Designer Clayton Jauncey Composer Michael Yezerksi Production Company Produced by Savage Films Cast Rose Byrne Rae Miranda Otto Sherry Matt Nable Max Myles Pollard Dan Brittany Hibbert Brittany Lily Parker Lily Renato Fabretti Jesus Aquifer Director Robert Connolly Producers Maggie Miles Tenille Kennedy Writer Justin Monjo Director of Photography Denson Baker Editor Andy Canny Production Designer Clayton Jauncey Composer Stephen Rae Production Company Produced by Arenamedia	Cast Callan Mulvey David Wilson Alex Bryans young David Gwy McKenna Alan Mannering Chad Smith Alan's friend Brooklyn Bathurst Alan's friend Talei Howell-Price David's wife Cockleshell Director Tony Ayres Producer Julie Eckersley Writer Marcel Dorney Director of Photography Germain McKicking Editor Julie-Anne de Ruvo Production Designer Leon Salom Composer Iain Grandage Production Company Produced by Matchbox Pictures Cast Brenna Harding Agnes Larwood Toby Wallace Brakey Elise McCredie Brakey's mum Peta Brady Mrs Larwood Paul Ireland Mr Larwood Sand Director Stephen Page Producer John Harvey Writer Justin Monjo Director of Photography Bonnie Elliott Editor Rochelle Oshlack Production Designer Jacob Nash Composer Guy Gross Production Companies	Produced by Brown Cab Productions in association with Bangarra Dance Theatre Cast Jakory Blanco Frank Jarli-Russell Blanco Max Waangenga Blanco Dad Kirk Page Dad's brother Denis Thorne Dad's cousin brother Tyson Birtles another brother Long, Clear View Director Mia Wasikowska Producer Kath Shelper Writer Mia Wasikowska Director of Photography Stefan Duscio Editor Mat Evans Production Designer Annie Beauchamp Production Company Produced by Scarlett Pictures Cast Matthew Shanley Vic Lang Julie Rigg narrator James Saunders preacher Di Adams Carol Lang Marika Teledzinska Strawberry Alison Amanda Bran Alison's tennis partner Boner McPharlin's Moll Director Justin Kurzel Producers Sarah Shaw Anna McLeish Writer Justin Kurzel Director of Photography Andrew Commis Editor	Michael J Lutman Original Music Hat Fitz Production Company Produced by Warp Films Australia Featuring Louise Harris Corey Knoblauch Craig Nelson Angela McCann Paige Goldsack Gwynne Rob 'Wacka' Stevens Ian Neal Sonya Lawson Hat Fitz Big World Director Warwick Thornton Producer Kath Shelper Writer Warwick Thornton Director of Photography Warwick Thornton Editor Roland Gallois Composer Andrew Lancaster Production Company Produced by Scarlett Pictures Cast James Fraser Davo Henri Phillips Biggie Nikita Leigh-Pritchard Meg James Fraser Tim Winton narrators In Colour [1.85:1] and [2.35:1] Distributor Soda Pictures
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There are nine stories in this collection. In 'Reunion', Christmas with an estranged mother-in-law turns into an unexpected riot of fun. 'Commission' shows a man going in search of his long-lost, long-resented father and finally discovering that he was a good man after all. In 'The Turning', a battered wife makes a new friend and finds religion. In 'Aquifer', a news report about the discovery of some bones sends a man back to his childhood home to relive the moment when he watched the school bully drown. 'Cockleshell' features a boy who follows the girl next door on her nightly fishing trips but can only guess

This propensity for short stories to be chopped up and rearranged is both their strength and their weakness: each mini-film can stand up on its own and be placed into dialogue with other discrete units but making them cohere into a whole piece of extended cinema is another challenge.

The title, of course, is a clue: in many of the tales, a character makes some kind of turn in his or her life. Clare McCarthy's title



story, for instance, centres on a battered wife (Rose Byrne) who is groping her way towards a religious revelation; in Warwick Thornton's 'Big World', a man (James Fraser) looks back on the moment when a crucial childhood friendship was severed. In other chapters, this sense of a 'turn' is less well defined, though this is not a weakness – on the contrary, a strong offering by Justin Kurzel, 'Boner McPharlin's Moll', simply uses a collage of semi-improvised monologues to recount the legend of the mysterious (and never seen) Boner; while in the gem of the collection, Mia Wasikowska's 'Long, Clear View', a boy's inner world is brought vividly – and sinisterly – to life in a series of beautifully observed vignettes.

Australia itself often takes centre stage, with several of the chapters saturated with the primal heat of the place and alert to the parched landscape's relationship with water. From the swimming pool into which Cate Blanchett and Robyn Nevin leap, fully clothed, in the joyously uplifting 'Reunion' (a directorial debut by Simon Stone) to the swampy waterhole in which a school bully (Gwy McKenna) drowns in Robert Connolly's 'Aquifer', water is the medium in which transformation takes place. Several stories are set at the beach: in Tony Ayres's 'Cockleshell', it is a place of painful sexual frustration, while Stephen Page's 'Sand' finds more urgent danger in this liminal zone as two brothers dig themselves into the fabric of the landscape with potentially horrific results. Page, a distinguished dancer and choreographer, is a descendant of the Nanukul people and his chapter is the only one in this collection to feature non-white protagonists. He chooses to tell his story without words, perhaps gesturing towards the relative voicelessness of indigenous people in Australian culture. But women, too, are relatively voiceless here: apart from 'Reunion' and 'The Turning' – in which the women are defined by their status as wives – these are all stories about men and boys.

Certainly, in this cut, the viewer is left with an abiding sense of place, a consistent atmosphere of whispery nostalgia and several strong thematic threads. If it's never finally clear what we're supposed to make of it as an integrated whole, it's nevertheless a mesmerising showcase of emotions, ideas and images. 



Walled in: Matt Nable, Rose Byrne

Unbroken

Director: Angelina Jolie
Certificate 15 137m 23s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Louis Zamperini wrote two memoirs, both entitled *Devil at My Heels*, but this is drawn from Laura Hillenbrand's bestselling biography *Unbroken*, subtitled 'A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption' – a tagline that outlines exactly what Angelina Jolie's film does with the material.

Perhaps conscious of criticisms levelled at the script she wrote for her directorial debut *In the Land of Blood and Honey* (2011), Jolie has called in Joel and Ethan Coen, Richard LaGravenese and William Nicholson to craft the material of Zamperini's life into an epic-length if episodic narrative – one that still has to cover a sequel's worth of post-traumatic stress and slow healing in captions after the film has ended with the war. The payoff is that it has been pruned of many of the mannerisms of the big, important picture it so patently is. Even the idealisation of the hero's Italian-speaking Mamma's cooking brings rewards when Zamperini keeps fellow survivors sane by talking through her recipes while they subsist on rainwater and stabbed sharks.

A troubled immigrant childhood and an athletic career are squeezed in early as flashbacks, bracketed by impressive aerial warfare sequences. Jolie takes cues from Steven Spielberg in his *Saving Private Ryan* loud-and-bloody mode (and specifically from his bomber-set *Amazing*



Finishing line: Jack O'Connell

Stories pilot episode 'The Mission'), powerfully conveying the cramped, terrifying conditions inside a damaged aircraft as the hero copes with stuck-open bomb bay doors and an injured crewmate before a perilous landing. After this it's a barely noted irony that Zamperini is dumped in the sea by a crash caused by mechanical failure rather than enemy action. The cast-adrift-in-an-open-boat ordeal – with the expected 'Day 3' to 'Day 47' captions – is given narrative weight, though this means building up the character of Zamperini's fellow survivor Phillips (from whom he was separated in captivity) only to drop him from the film.

The point of this preliminary material is to stress that Zamperini's sufferings weren't all down to one fiendish Japanese war criminal, though the bulk of the film deals with the privations and abuses he went through in a harsh Tokoyo POW camp. Japanese pop singer Miyavi makes Zamperini's nemesis Watanabe Mutsuhiro into a memorably sly, flirtatiously sadistic, subtly seething monster who wouldn't be out of place in Oshima Nagisa's homoerotic *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* (1983) or Val Guest's sensationalist *The Camp on Blood Island* (1958), but *Unbroken* hints at the monster's reasons – a frustrated hope of being an officer, the humiliating duty of overseeing "enemies of Japan". *Unbroken* isn't free of the broad-stroke mannerisms and PG-13 Spielbergian fuzziness that mark mainstream Hollywood cinema in its awards-bid mode: a feint towards a mass execution that doesn't happen parallels the clunky moment in *Schindler's List* when concentration-camp inmates are herded into showers and... given a shower.

The film suggests that the willing acceptance of pain which is part of the athlete's lot gave him the physical and emotional resilience necessary to survive his ordeals. The drawn-from-life climax as a soot-covered Zamperini hefts a beam over his head while taking a beating parallels the crucifixion, though Jolie films it in a way that makes him less a Christ figure than an avatar of the current brand of cinema messiah, the superhero. The scene evokes the Steve Ditko pages in *Amazing Spider-Man* #33 in which Spider-Man struggles to lift a piece of heavy machinery from his back, stressing the effort necessary to pull off the sort of feat comics usually toss off in a casual panel. (NB: the two planes Zamperini flies are called Super Man and The Green Hornet, which is historically accurate.) Jack O'Connell plays Zamperini like Peter Parker: focused and stubborn, sometimes even difficult, but engaging without making too much of a fuss about it. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Angelina Jolie
Clayton Townsend
Matthew Baer
Erwin Stoff

Screenplay
Joel Coen
Ethan Coen
Richard LaGravenese
William Nicholson
Based on the book
by Laura Hillenbrand

Director of Photography
Roger Deakins

Editors
Tim Squyres
William Goldenberg

Production Designer
Jon Hutman

Music
Alexandre Desplat
Production Sound Mixer
David Lee
Costume Designer
Louise Frogley

Production Companies
Universal Pictures
and Legendary
Pictures present

a Jolie Pas, 3 Arts
Entertainment
production
An Angelina Jolie film
Presented in
association with
Dentsu Inc./
Fuji Television
Network, Inc.
Filmed with the
assistance of
the Australian
Government, Screen
Queensland, the
New South Wales
Government
Executive Producers
Mike Garriss
Thomas Tull
Jon Jashni

Cast
Jack O'Connell
Louis 'Louie'
Zamperini
Domhnall Gleeson
Captain Russell
Allen 'Phil' Phillips
Miyavi
Corporal Mutsuhiro
Watanabe, 'The Bird'
Garrett Hedlund

Commander
John Fitzgerald
Finn Wittrock
Sergeant Francis
'Mac' McNamara
Jai Courtney
Hugh 'Cup'
Cupernell
Maddalena Ischiale
Louise
Vincenzo Amato
Anthony
John Magaro
Frank Tinker
Luke Treadaway
Miller
Louis McIntosh
Harris
Ross Anderson
Blackie

**Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

The Pacific, World War II. Louis Zamperini, a former Olympic runner serving in the US Air Force, survives when a plane sent on a rescue mission crashes into the sea. After 47 days adrift, Zamperini and another airman are found by a Japanese ship. Zamperini is abused in a harsh Tokyo POW camp by Corporal Watanabe Mutsuhiro, but he refuses to become a propaganda broadcaster. The POWs are removed to a camp in northern Japan and forced to load barges with coal. Watanabe is again in charge, and singles out Zamperini for abuse. At the end of the war, Zamperini returns home.

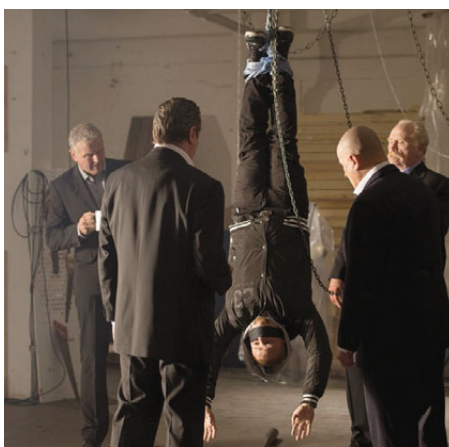
We Still Kill the Old Way

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Sacha Bennett
Certificate 18 94m 12s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

"I've always believed in quality not quantity," says Ian Ogilvy's retired gangland boss Richie Archer on being apprised of the odds against his plan to take on the fearsome E2 gang, not merely more numerous but also half a century younger than Richie and his associates. However, this is not a lesson taken to heart by director/co-writer Sacha Bennett, who serves up essentially a reread of the 2009 vigilante film *Harry Brown*, but with an avenging quartet instead of Michael Caine's solo act. There are also numerous (self-) conscious nods to other crime films (*The Italian Job*, *The Long Good Friday*, *Reservoir Dogs*) and the mythology that has sprung up around real-life gangland families such as the Krays and the Richardsons, presumably in the hope that something will brush off en route. The film shares a title with the English-release version of Elio Petri's Sicilian crime drama *A ciascuno il suo* (1967), but aside from both films being about an independent murder investigation, they have nothing in common.

Richie and his brother Charlie (Steven Berkoff) once ruled the East End with the proverbial rod of iron, garnering a fair amount of respect both from local residents such as Lizzie Davis (Lysette Anthony) and from the police, who were happy to turn a blind eye when the Archers disposed of troublesome criminals on their behalf. Although it's not stated upfront that the Archers only did their own kind and wouldn't touch a woman or a child, it's made clear that the E2 gang are happy to trample on those taboos, as they're shown threatening a potential (female) witness's baby before spending the evening gang-raping their leader's new girlfriend. Catching them in the act, Charlie remonstrates with them, and his resulting murder triggers his brother's return to the UK and his reunion with three colleagues who have clearly become bored with retirement ("You know what? I'm really enjoying this," one of them says during a low-powered car chase prior



Hang gang: *We Still Kill the Old Way*

to yet another session of torturing miscreants).

Once the basic premise is established, almost every narrative incident can be seen coming a mile off, the only surprises being the location of the climactic shootout (a weirdly understaffed hospital) and a mid-point revelation of a key character's parentage. Characterisation is perfunctory throughout – the E2 gang in particular are one-note goons (Danny-Boy Hatchard's quasi-Method twitching as their leader Aaron notwithstanding) and even veterans like James Cosmo are given few distinguishing features beyond a bizarre tic of shouting every third sentence. That said, the baggage the more experienced actors bring to their roles and their evident delight in being cast as geriatric action leads make this more fun than the average Danny Dyer flick (the only Dyer here is his daughter Dani, playing a rebellious teenager badly out of her depth) – although a coda in which Richie muses about taking on City bankers in a hypothetical sequel sounds more promising than anything on offer here. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jonathan Sothcott
Neil Jones
Rod Smith
Colin Lomax

Written by

Dougie Brimson
Gary Lawrence
Sacha Bennett

Cinematographer

Ishmael Issa

Editor

Guy Ducker

Production Designer

Lucy Attwood

Production

Sam Masters

Costume Designer

Lenka Padysakova

Stunt Co-ordinator

Jude Poyer

production

Executive Producers

Nick Aldrich
James Mullinger
Adam Sutherland
Damien Morley
Adam Stephen Kelly

Cast

Ian Ogilvy
Richie Archer
Alison Doody
Susan Taylor
Danny-Boy Hatchard
Aaron
Chris Ellison
Roy
Lysette Anthony
Lizzy Davis
Tony Denham
Butch
Red Madrell
DK
Nick Henson
Houghton
Adele Silva
Gemma
Anouska Mond
Carmen
James Cosmo
Arthur
Steven Berkoff
Charlie Archer

Dani Dyer

Lauren
Sagar Radia
Maz
John Samuel Kande
Leroy
Elijah Baker
JP

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Anchor Bay
Entertainment UK Ltd

East London, the present. The E2 gang indiscriminately terrorise the local populace, causing older residents such as Lizzie Davis to reminisce fondly about 60s gangsters Richie and Charlie Archer and their strict code of honour. When E2 leader Aaron lures new girlfriend Lauren into an alleyway to be raped by his friends, Charlie catches them at it, remonstrates, and is kicked to death. Lizzie witnesses the E2 gang leaving the alleyway and informs investigating officer Susan Taylor. Richie returns to the UK from his Spanish bolt-hole. Aaron demands Lauren's silence. Lizzie shows online videos of Charlie's murder and Lauren's rape to Richie.

After Charlie's funeral, Richie tells former associates Roy, Arthur and Butch that he's going after the killers. Taylor warns Richie not to get involved. Richie visits former detective Houghton, with whom he used to have a cooperative professional relationship, and obtains files on the suspects. Richie and colleagues torture and kill E2 members Maz, Leroy and JP, but fail to uncover Aaron's whereabouts. Richie collapses during the last torture session and is taken to hospital. Lauren tips off Aaron, who invades the hospital with the heavily armed E2 gang. Richie and his colleagues are waiting for them. In the ensuing bloodbath, Aaron and numerous gang members are killed. Taylor accepts Richie's self-defence plea, and thanks him for protecting her daughter – Lauren. Richie decides to stay in the UK with Lizzie.

Whiplash

USA 2013
Director: Damien Chazelle
Certificate 15 106m 27s

Reviewed by Calum Marsh

Andrew (Miles Teller), the hero of Damien Chazelle's *Whiplash*, is an ambitious fellow. Indeed, he aspires to be no less than the greatest living jazz drummer, and he thus devotes himself, with monk-like rigour, to its gruelling practice. But it takes two to seize mastery. Andrew has a tutor: Terence Fletcher (J.K. Simmons), conductor at an illustrious New York conservatory, whose approach to higher education seems rather like an extended tribute to R. Lee Ermey in *Full Metal Jacket*. In Andrew, it soon transpires, Fletcher has found an ideal pupil, as eager to endure pain for the sake of his art as Fletcher is to mete it out, and before long the two are enjoying a daily training regime whose cruelty would make a sadomasochist blush.

Fletcher hardly seems sated by Andrew's persistent improvements, and is no less barbarous after an inspired performance than after a dismal one; and Chazelle, training a keen eye on the proceedings, seems to delight in the spectacle of relentless punishment. He may be on to something there. Simmons, who played a similarly cantankerous authority figure in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* films, is an exemplary shouter, and he gets a lot of mileage here out of a performance style that (in keeping with the jazz theme) risks sounding one-note. Much of the pleasure afforded by the film is derived from Fletcher's exhilaratingly virulent tirades, which boast the same amusing theatricality that made Peter Capaldi's tongue-lashings the centrepiece of the BBC's *The Thick of It*. "You are a worthless pansy-ass," Fletcher barks at a teary Andrew in the middle of practice, "who is now weeping and slobbering all over my drum set like a nine-year-old girl." That's about the only line suitable for print.

It isn't all amusement, of course: Fletcher's methods prove too extreme to remain uninterrogated, and soon the film conspires to pose rather more serious questions and face up to more serious themes. Chazelle's ruminations on the price of greatness don't amount to much: "There are no two words in the English language more harmful," Fletcher observes, "than 'good job'" – a bit of fortune-cookie insight that the film welcomes us to take or leave. **A**



Slave to the rhythm: Miles Teller

⬅ (There's also an apocryphal anecdote about Charlie Parker and a near-decapitation meant to arouse more reflection than it musters.) More frustrating still is Chazelle's tendency to defer to screenwriting convention for the sake of a more 'well-rounded' (read: more clichéd) film: a perfunctory girlfriend destined to be discarded on Andrew's road to jazz mastery is an especially tiresome concession to a Hollywood template, but even scenes with Andrew's father feel like so much fat.

Where, one wonders, are the rigour and discipline so righteously advocated by the characters? Had Fletcher been leaning over Chazelle's shoulder in the writing room, snapping at every mistake, such lapses of judgement might have been corrected. Nevertheless, *Whiplash* ends on a high note: Andrew's dazzling solo performance before a sold-out JVC festival crowd, with Fletcher egging him on. It's here that the film settles into precisely the right groove, with its two leads and the practice that binds them – and no moral lessons or supporting characters to get in the way. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jason Blum Helen Estabrook Michel Litvak David Lancaster	of Way production A Damien Chazelle film	Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS In Colour [2.35:1]
Written by Damien Chazelle Director of Photography Sharone Meir Editor Tom Cross Production Designer Melanie Paizis-Jones Score Justin Hurwitz Sound Thomas Curley Costume Designer Lisa Norcia	Executive Producers Jason Reitman Gary Michael Walters Couper Samuelsen Jeanette Volturno-Brill	Distributor Sony Pictures Releasing UK
Production Companies Bold Films presents a Blumhouse/Right	Cast Miles Teller Andrew Neyman J.K. Simmons Terence Fletcher Paul Reiser Jim Melissa Benoist Nicole Austin Stowell Ryan Nate Lang Carl	

New York, present day. Andrew is an aspiring jazz drummer at the Shaffer Conservatory, where conductor Terence Fletcher, an esteemed but intimidating conductor, leads an elite band through a training programme of notorious brutality. Having impressed Fletcher while drumming alone after school, Andrew is invited to attend the band's morning practice, where he receives a torrent of verbal and physical abuse. Determined to thrive under this pressure, Andrew redoubles his efforts, which pay off when he is asked to fill in for the first drummer at a performance out of town. Andrew becomes a star pupil. However, he is involved in a car accident and severely injured while rushing to get to a performance on time, and is ejected from the band. He testifies anonymously against Fletcher in a case mounted by the parents of a student who committed suicide under his tutelage; Fletcher loses his job. Running into him at a jazz bar one evening, Fletcher invites Andrew to join him for a performance at the JVC jazz festival. Andrew agrees. On the night of the performance, Fletcher reveals that he knows Andrew testified, and in retaliation has left him without the proper song list; after foundering through one number, Andrew launches into 'Caravan', which he knows by heart, impressing Fletcher all over again.

Wild

USA 2014
Director: Jean-Marc Vallée
Certificate 15 115m 28s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

Cheryl Strayed. That's the name of Reese Witherspoon's character in *Wild*. It's also a statement: after the death of her mother, Cheryl did indeed stray – a lot. Flashbacks show her cheating on her husband while abusing heroin. By choosing the new surname 'Strayed' after splitting from her husband, Cheryl is almost branding herself, acknowledging her sins. And so this party girl must embrace a different type of 'wild' – the wilderness of the hiking trail – in order to forgive herself and move on.

Screenwriter Nick Hornby's adaptation of Strayed's memoir focuses on her journey on the Pacific Crest Trail, using visual and thematic triggers to jog Strayed's memory and plunge the audience back into her past. Sights, songs and snatched words of dialogue all usher in flashbacks that reveal more about her personal journey. The vast open countryside, beautifully captured by cinematographer Yves Bélanger, contrasts with the more populated world of the younger Cheryl, whose happy life is shattered when her mother (Laura Dern) dies. Neither temporal framework is idealised: there are pleasures and pains in both past and present as our heroine struggles with difficult memories and attempts to adjust to life on the road.

The latter scenario brings regular laughs. Despite her best efforts, Strayed is an inexperienced hiker and the script pokes gentle, affectionate fun at her naivety. A scene in which she labours to pull a heavy rucksack on to her back is both comical and a poignant reminder that nobody is there to help: it's up to Strayed to help herself. While many of the characters who cross her path bring her something, from companionship to advice, the responsibility for both survival and change rests on her shoulders. The dangers for a woman travelling alone are clearly signalled, as are the problems of identifying a true threat: the script and soundtrack deliberately mislead us as Strayed's instincts waver, suspecting men who may or may not be out to harm her. One man is painted as sinister as he insists on driving her to his home – only for his wife to welcome them for a meal. Later, a tense scene sees a group of men eyeing



To hell and backpack: Reese Witherspoon

Strayed with what may be genuine criminal intent. Through moments like this, *Wild* offers a distinctly female point of view, perhaps aided by the fact that Witherspoon also acted as producer.

Another memorable scene sees Strayed finally allowing herself to buy a lipstick, shave her legs and go on a date during a small-town stop. Implicitly, she has been denying herself the pleasures that symbolise those which – in excess – led to the breakdown of her marriage and arguably her whole self. As ever, Hornby uses comedy to ensure this is far from preachy: a kind but blunt cosmetics representative posits that lipstick won't serve a purpose without proper personal hygiene. "I think you should make it a priority, sweetie," she ventures, when a grubby Strayed assures her she's on the case.

It's details such as these that take the audience on the road with the heroine: comfortable shoes and hot showers quickly assume the same significance in our minds as they do in hers. Along with Hornby's script and assured direction from Jean-Marc Vallée (*Dallas Buyers Club*), Witherspoon's naturalistic, generous performance ensures that *Wild* swerves to avoid clichés, becoming a quietly rewarding journey towards personal resolution. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Reese Witherspoon Bruna Papandrea Bill Pohlad Screenplay Nick Hornby Based on the book by Cheryl Strayed Director of Photography Yves Bélanger Film Editors John Mac Murphy Martin Pensa Production Designer John Pains Production Sound Mixer Dick Hansen Costume Designer Melissa Bruning	TSG Entertainment Finance LLC. Production Companies Fox Searchlight presents a Pacific Standard production Executive Producers Bergen Swanson Nathan Ross Nick Hornby	W. Earl Brown Frank Mo McRae Jimmy Carter Keene McRae Leif Nyland
Production Companies ©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and	Cast Reese Witherspoon Cheryl Strayed Laura Dern Bobbi Lambrecht Thomas Sadowski Paul Michiel Huisman Jonathan Gaby Hoffmann Aimee Hurt Kevin Rankin Greg	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)

US, 1995. Cheryl Strayed undertakes a hike of more than 1,000 miles on the Pacific Crest Trail, camping in a tent as she goes. She makes stops to stock up on supplies, picking up parcels from friends and befriending the occasional fellow traveller. At one stop, she is advised on footwear and packing her backpack properly, which eases her journey a little.

Flashbacks fill us in on her past. We see the young Cheryl enjoying a happy home life with her single mother and her brother, before her mother is struck by cancer when Cheryl – by this time married to Paul – is at university. After her mother dies, Cheryl begins using heroin and sleeping with many different men, eventually causing the breakdown of her marriage. She and Paul amicably split after Cheryl makes the decision to walk the Pacific Crest Trail, inspired by spotting a guide book in a shop.

On a later leg of the trail, she meets and sleeps with a man who invites her to a gig. She writes Paul's name in the sand, declaring it will be the last time ever. Cheryl completes the trail with a renewed sense of purpose.



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Chief Executive Officer Australian Film Television and Radio School

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Home cinema



Song sung blue: Mance Lipscomb (left) and Lightnin' Hopkins in *The Blues Accordin' to Lightnin' Hopkins*

WHEN WE DANCE

Les Blank's films are joyful, you-are-there dispatches from the disappearing margins of American life

LES BLANK: ALWAYS FOR PLEASURE

THE BLUES ACCORDIN' TO LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS/ GOD RESPECTS US WHEN WE WORK, BUT LOVES US WHEN WE DANCE/SPEND IT ALL/ A WELL SPENT LIFE/ DRY WOOD/HOT PEPPER/ ALWAYS FOR PLEASURE/GARLIC IS AS GOOD AS TEN MOTHERS/SPROUT WINGS AND FLY/ IN HEAVEN THERE IS NO BEER?/GAP-TOOTHED WOMEN/YUM, YUM, YUM! A TASTE OF CAJUN AND CREOLE COOKING/THE MAESTRO: KING OF THE COWBOY ARTISTS/SWORN TO THE DRUM: A TRIBUTE TO FRANCISCO AGUABELLA

Les Blank; USA; 1968-95; Criterion Collection/Region A Blu-ray; 31/20/43/44/37/54/57/50/30/49/31/31/53/34 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: new interviews (with Blank's sons Harrod and Beau, documentary subject Gerald Gaxiola and friends/collaborators Skip Gerson, Maureen Gosling, Taylor Hackford, Werner Herzog, Susan Kell, Tom Luddy, David Silberberg, Chris Simon and Alice Waters), excerpt

from 'Les Blank: A Quiet Revelation' by Harrod Blank and Gina Leibrecht, Blank shorts 'The Sun's Gonna Shine' (1968), 'More Fess' (1978), 'Julie: Old Time Tales of the Blue Ridge' (1991), 'My Old Fiddle: A Visit with Tommy Jarrell in the Blue Ridge' (1994) and 'The Maestro Rides Again' (2005), two outtake performances from 'The Blues Accordin' to Lightnin' Hopkins'; booklet featuring essay by Andrew Horton

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Les Blank suggested that theatre managers playing his film *Garlic Is As Good As Ten Mothers* (1980) should toast a few heads of garlic during the screenings, so as to perfume the audience with the scent of the stinking rose. He dubbed this process 'Smellaround'. I know a programmer who tried it at a memorial screening shortly after the Southern-born, Berkeley-based one-man-band documentarian died in 2013 at the age of 77. Apparently the stench was overpowering, and lingered.

This isn't just ethnographic William Castle showmanship, but gets at an important aspect of Blank's films: there's something about them that seems to chafe at being bound to the dimensions of the screen, to demand to be out and about in the wide world. But now home viewers can, if so inclined, attempt to achieve the Smellaround effect in their living rooms. Previously available

for purchase exclusively through Blank's Flower Films, the meat of his filmography – 14 features and eight shorts finished between 1968 and 2006, spread across three Blu-ray discs – is now available in a box-set from Criterion.

I suspect that Blank's works, based as they are on scenes of raucous congregation, will lose more than most films do when removed from the communal viewing experience. I first went through Blank's filmography, more or less *in toto*, in 2008, at a complete retrospective of his work at New York's Film Forum. Rarely have films given me such a compulsion to want to be inside them: you want to join the high-stepping Mardi Gras processions in *Always for Pleasure* (1978), kick up your heels in the sweatbox honky-tonks, eat gumbo and crawfish and drink until you can't move, and the films fool you into thinking you'd be brave enough to try. Seemingly swept up in the swell of the crowd or reeling on the dance floor, Blank's camera-eye is as much that of participant as observer, though his digressive drifts are never purposeless, nor is the quality of invitation in his films an accident. In an excerpt from work-in-progress documentary *Les Blank: A Quiet Revelation* by Gina Leibrecht and Les's son Harrod included in the Criterion set, Blank

speaks of a painting of flamenco dancers by John Singer Sargent which had the same effect on him that his films have had on many a viewer: "I used to just look at this thing and wish I could be there, participating in this atmosphere."

Blank was at his NYC retro in person, as he often was for his screenings, talking about his fancy for ladies with *les dents du bonheur* before a screening of *Gap-Toothed Women* (1987). Seeing him then, I wouldn't have believed that he was ever going to die. He as good as created the documentarian-as-bon-vivant template, and you imagine him with a 16mm Eclair in one hand and a Dixie beer in the other. I've heard young filmmakers – such as Bill Ross, who is one half of an outstanding New Orleans-based filmmaking duo (45365, *Tchoupitoulas*) with his brother Turner – refer to Blank's heroic example.

Blank is most closely associated with the various ethnic enclaves of the state of Louisiana, though in fact he was born and raised in what he describes as an "upper-middle-class" home in Tampa, Florida. In a 1998 essay, he wrote of his early enthrallment with music there: "I discovered entirely new worlds that were shaped by the central core of musical performance. I became fascinated by eerie and ecstatic African-American baptism ceremonies in the river of downtown Tampa; the country-music dance halls packed with hard-drinking, loud, working-class descendants of Scotch-Irish immigrants; and the infectiously rhythmic Cuban-American rumba music blaring from the hand-rolled cigar factories of the Cuban part of town."

In the mid-50s Blank attended Tulane University in New Orleans, where he studied English with the intention of becoming a writer. In the booklet accompanying Criterion's set, Andrew Horton writes that Blank's years in Louisiana "led him to enjoy going beyond the sorts of 'touristy' interactions the region had to offer, to want to make personal contact with all kinds of different people". By Blank's own account, he also did a hell of a lot of drinking there, pledging Sigma Chi and partaking in the Dionysian experience of Southern frat life – you might say he eventually made a career of looking for the party. After Tulane, Blank headed west to study playwriting at the University of California, Berkeley, took a graduate degree from the University of Southern California film school in Los Angeles, and eventually went to work in so-called 'industrial' films, though his inclination would prove to be more towards the handmade. He gravitated towards the Flower Children who'd begun to appear on Sunset Strip, drawn by their exotic colour and, presumably, whatever else about the hippie culture would attract a man with a history of partying. On Easter Sunday 1967 he filmed a 'love-in' at LA's Elysian Park, and the results of his dusk-to-dawn shoot would become *God Respects Us When We Work, But Loves Us When We Dance* (1968).

This, Blank's first film under the Flower Films banner, is on Disc 1 of Criterion's set, alongside a work more typical of those to come, *The Blues Accordin' to Lightnin' Hopkins*, a portrait of the titular bluesman and, not incidentally,

his hometown of Centerville, Texas. Blank was based in California for the whole of his career, in LA until 1972 and in Berkeley thereafter, and occasionally shot in his adopted home – *Garlic*, for example, prominently features Alice Waters, founder of the Berkeley restaurant Chez Panisse, while 1994's *The Maestro: King of the Cowboy Artists* follows bodybuilder-turned-insurrectionist-artist Gerald Gaxiola. (Both are among the assembled subjects and friends who have recorded video interviews for the Criterion set.)

Blank is best known, however, for his excavations of the country back east, including the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina (*Sprout Wings and Fly*), Texas (*Lightnin' Hopkins* and *A Well Spent Life*), and always, always Louisiana, where five of the longer films included in Criterion's set (*Spend It All*, *Dry Wood*, *Hot Pepper*, *Always for Pleasure* and *Yum, Yum, Yum*) were shot.

The draws are food and music, preferably both, and Blank matches indigenous song to cutaway views of landscape and people – both, while often colourful, transcending that old triviality 'local colour'. Layering images over music with longtime editor Maureen Gosling, Blank shows these homemade sounds as inextricable from the place they come from – the BBQs and sunsets and views of passers-by from a front porch and the glimpsed vignettes of children acting like adults and vice versa.

If I had to select a single moment in Blank's filmography that shows exactly why he is so special, I'd go with a montage that occurs at about the halfway mark of *Hot Pepper* (1973),

His camera-eye is as much that of participant as observer, though his digressive drifts are never purposeless



Take me to the Mardi Gras: *Always for Pleasure*

over zydeco musician Clifton Chenier performing his 'I'm Coming Home', which concludes with the image of a piece of driftwood floating along the mirror-reflective surface of a river.

This serene image is recollected, oddly, by a lyric sung in Polish in Blank's *In Heaven There Is No Beer?* (1984), an exploration of the Polish-American polka subculture: "How quickly life travels onward/Like a swift stream at flood." Blank's films quietly recommend these kinds of intercultural connections. Near its conclusion, *In Heaven...* features a reggae rendition of the polka-standard title track. This is after the film has made a convincing argument for this most square and endlessly ridiculed of genres as a brand of protest music, through which white working-class ethnics of (mostly) Mitteleuropean backgrounds can retain a sense of folk identity in the face of pop industrialisation. "How quickly life travels onward" – and at one point or another in almost every Blank film, a subject notes that it travels more quickly than it used to. This is what makes these most lovable of movies rather heartbreaking, for they are being filmed at a moment when the disappearance of the ways of life they depict has already been assured.

Criterion's box-set, while far and away the most affordable and accessible collection of Blank's work to date, contains a few prominent omissions. Among the missing are Blank's two films featuring *Garlic* interviewee Werner Herzog (1980's *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe* and 1982's *Burden of Dreams*); his 1974 *A Poem Is a Naked Person*, commissioned by the country musician Leon Russell and shot in and around his rambunctious Oklahoma studio; and 1976's *Chulas Fronteras*, which documents the music produced along the Texas-Mexico border. (Also missing, perhaps mercifully, is Blank's 30-minute *Huey Lewis and the News: Be-FORE!* of 1987.)

Blank has, I'm sure, been accused somewhere or other of aestheticising or romanticising his subjects, a charge often faced by filmmakers who produce work featuring poor or working-class people in which their poverty isn't the only or most interesting thing about them. (Some of them – horror of horrors! – even insist on aestheticising or romanticising themselves.) Blank undeniably has a perspective. He doesn't ignore segregation but he prefers evidence of unity. He doesn't deny sadness but dwells longer on joy. One thing he does deny outright is the existence of hangover; we see people getting blacked out and we see them back at work later, but there's none of the retribution in between – he is all Saturday night, no Sunday morning. Blank is not punitive. His films have little use for hell, though they often refer to paradise, from the Elysian Fields of the LA love-in to the lost Arcadia of the Cajuns who settled in the Louisiana swamps.

In a 1789 letter from Paris, Thomas Jefferson posited an idea that the earth belonged to the living, not the dead. In 1972, another great American, the bluesman Mance Lipscomb, subject of *A Well Spent Life*, told Blank: "You can live in heaven here on earth." Inasmuch as Blank's films embody a philosophy, it can be found between these statements. ☺

New releases

BOY MEETS GIRL

Lloyd Bacon; USA 1938; Warner Archives/

Region 1 DVD NTSC; 87 minutes; 1.37:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The Hollywood studios never saw much of a reason to not openly mock their own culture and procedures in the 30s, and did so relentlessly enough to make you wonder if audiences were ever as amused by or engaged with Dream Factory baloney as the insiders certainly were.

This rarely revived fifth-gear comedy is prototypical, dancing like an antic child on the head of the industry via hijinks nonsense nominally inspired by Hollywood screenwriters Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. James Cagney and Pat O'Brien are two double-talking, anti-authoritarian staff screenwriters, prone to shirking and practical jokes, facing the hopeless task of writing yet another formula western for fading oater idol Dick Foran. With baffled high-culture-minded studio exec Ralph Bellamy (a riff on Irving Thalberg, not anyone at Warner) on their backs, the pair of irreverent motormouths connive to exact revenge – by pairing Foran's egotist hayseed with a newborn baby, which unexpectedly leads to a smash-hit franchise that consumes everybody.

The texture of the film is rabidity and ridiculous, if less funny than it thinks it is or than others of its fast-talking ilk, from 1932's *Once in a Lifetime* to 1938's *Crashing Hollywood*. (*Boy Meets Girl* began as a hit Broadway show, but screenwriting stage vets Bella and Sam Spewack were no Hecht/MacArthur, and much of the movie's non-sequitur badinage seems defter on the page than in the actors' mouths.) In any case, the madcap exuberance is infectious, with the Warner stable in full trot.

Cagney is nearly toddler-maniac in his compulsion to quip, O'Brien's sardonic gravity steals every scene, Frank McHugh makes a lunch out of his agent's role, and bubble-headed blonde Marie Wilson holds her own as the infant star's goofy mother.

Disc: Standard archival print.

COME BACK TO THE 5 & DIME, JIMMY DEAN, JIMMY DEAN

Robert Altman; USA 1982; Olive Films/Region A

Blu-ray; 110 minutes; 1.78:1; Features: interview

with playwright and screenwriter Ed Graczyk

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Robert Altman had been on the skids before but he did it with some panache the second time around. He'd had to wait until he was in his early forties to direct a film exactly the way he wanted to, and when he really and truly turfed out with the box-office debacle of *Popeye* in 1980, after approximately a decade of relevance, he went right back on ice. He worked on a smaller scale through the Reagan years – they were tough on almost everybody – and aside from some genuine chin-scratchers (*O.C. and Stiggs*, anyone?), his bread-and-butter during this period was adapting from the stage: *Beyond Therapy*, *Fool for Love*, *Secret Honor* and *Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*.

The 1984 *Secret Honor* has long since been rehabilitated on the basis of Philip Baker Hall's performance as Richard M. Nixon on a long,

dark night of the soul, and now *Five & Dime*'s time has come. Altman's Broadway staging of Ed Graczyk's play hadn't been an auspicious success but, undaunted, he took his whole cast of Cher, Sandy Dennis, Karen Black, Kathy Bates and Marta Heflin and shot it as a film.

It takes place at a Woolworth's counter in drought-stricken McCarthy, Texas, in 1975, 20 years after the members of a high-school club called the Disciples of James Dean have sworn to meet on the anniversary of the actor's death. Sissy (Cher) is still doing the same old job at the dime store and seems not to have changed at all, while no one recognises elegant out-of-towner Joanne (Black). But in fact Sissy has been covering up a double mastectomy, and Joanne is a post-op transsexual who used to be 'Joe', the club's token boy member. These two, who get all the best material and a share of the bad, are never less than all-in, and while Graczyk's script is ineloquent in the asking, his question – what makes a woman? – is clearly one that resounds with his director.

Throughout, Altman shuttles between the present of 75 and scenes from 20 years earlier, in which the same actors, playing their younger selves, are seen reflected in the mirror behind the soda fountain, setting up a closing-credits *coup de théâtre* in which the camera surveys the Woolworth's in an indeterminate future, empty and abandoned. It's more moving than it has any right to be, which is one definition of 'direction'.

Disc: An attractive if heavy-grain transfer, restoring the film to its palette of an unsold, dusty box of Esther Price chocolates.

THE FRESHMAN

Sam Taylor and Fred Newmeyer; USA 1925; Criterion/

Region A Blu-Ray and Region 1 DVD Dual Format;

76 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: Harold Lloyd shorts 'The Marathon', 'An Eastern Westerner' and 'High and Dizzy', 1966 introduction to the film by Lloyd, audio commentaries, conversation between archivist Richard Correll and Kevin Brownlow, footage from a 1963 Delta Kappa Alpha tribute to Lloyd, Lloyd's 1953 appearance on TV show 'What's My Line?'

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

This is in many ways the archetypal Harold Lloyd movie, presenting him as the ra-ra American go-getter and conformist who is influenced by advertising and by movies themselves. It was part of Lloyd's considerable charm that he admitted no limit to American possibility, and you seldom feel any edge of desperation in his



Campus doofus: *The Freshman*

work. He is in his early thirties in *The Freshman* and looks it if you peer closely enough – but Lloyd never made movies that encourage you to look close like that, or to question the rules of the game. Whether this makes him genuinely heroic or just evasive is open to interpretation.

Lloyd's films try to keep up with the times but are basically old-fashioned: in *The Freshman*, a title introduces heroine Peggy (Jobyna Ralston), with her Mary Pickford curls, as "the kind of girl your mother must have been". A modern sensibility might be made very uneasy by such an idea; in fact, it might be the basis of a sick joke, but that shows just how far modern comedy has moved on from Lloyd's day.

Lloyd's *Freshman* character will do anything to become popular on his college campus, spending his money on ice cream for everyone, unaware that he's being mocked behind his back by all but Peggy, who sees his true spirit. To get on the football team, he is even willing to be used as a dummy for tackling practice in a long sequence that verges on the desperate in theory if not in tone.

For that's the curious thing about Lloyd: his tone is disarmingly sunny no matter what. In the scene where he is told that he is just a campus joke, Lloyd takes it all in, tries to brush it off for Peggy's benefit, and then collapses in her lap in tears until she pep-talks him out of defeat, which doesn't take long. The disquiet in the work of Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin never touches Lloyd. Maybe that's what made him so popular with audiences, and why being popular is the theme of *The Freshman*, arguably the zenith of his output.

Disc: A first-rate transfer with a very peppy score by Carl Davis, plus three earlier shorts that show Lloyd still attempting to find his screen character.

THE GIRL WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

Mario Bava; Italy 1963; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and

Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 86/92 minutes; 1.66:1 Features:

new featurette, audio commentary, introduction, trailers

Reviewed by James Blackford

Mario Bava's stylish, influential film is widely regarded as the first Italian *giallo*, that mode of procedural thriller with added sex and horror that boomed in the late 60s and early 70s ('*giallo*' refers to the yellow sleeves of the pulp paperbacks printed by Italian publishing house Arnoldo Mondadori Editore in the post-war years).

The Girl Who Knew Too Much tells the tale of a young American woman, Nora Davis (Leticia Román), who witnesses a grisly murder on the first night of a holiday in Rome. When the police don't believe her story, Nora enlists the help of young Dr Marcello Bassi (John Saxon), and the duo find themselves on the trail of the 'Alphabet Murderer', who has so far killed victims with last names beginning with A, B, and C...

Originally envisaged by its producers as a light-hearted romantic thriller in the Hitchcockian vein, Bava's approved Italian cut of *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* stresses high suspense and horror over humour, boasting several thrilling, stylishly rendered set pieces that place Nora in ever more perilous scenarios. Bava's film also boasts a suitably deranged killer replete with fetishised attire, Freudian hang-ups



BIRTH OF A BLOCKBUSTER

Some say it was an apology for *The Birth of a Nation*. Far from it: *Intolerance* was D.W. Griffith's way of showing off

INTOLERANCE

D.W. Griffith 1916; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 168 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: Carl Davis's orchestral score, Griffith's companion feature films 'The Fall of Babylon' and 'The Mother and the Law', video interview with Kevin Brownlow, 40-page booklet

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

There's a common misconception that D.W. Griffith made *Intolerance: Love's Struggle Throughout the Ages* (1916) as an apology for *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which had fomented so much hate across America. But that simply isn't true. Far from apologising for that film, Griffith wanted to repeat its storming financial success. In fact, the accusations levelled at *Birth* were for Griffith simply another example of brutish intolerance.

The next project on his slate was *The Mother and the Law*, an anti-capitalist story about a young couple, a strike and a false accusation of murder. It's a very strong film (you can watch the 1919 re-edit in this two-disc set), fuelled by Griffith's passion for social justice, his dynamic pacing and that trait of his that you can label sentiment or sympathy. But *The Mother and the Law* is no *Birth of a Nation* – Griffith craved something bigger, with a greater impact and a higher sense of seriousness. A project to rival Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) and hopefully outdo it. And so he elaborated *The Mother and the Law* into *Intolerance*, interweaving his original story with three others (the fall of Babylon, the crucifixion of Christ and the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of the Huguenots), all of them illumining hypocrisy and prejudice and illustrating the fact that the travails of a young working-class couple in modern America are as old as time. There is one form of intolerance that *Intolerance* doesn't concern itself with. I'll leave you to fill in that gap.

So you shouldn't think of this as Griffith's defence, or self-justification – this is pretty much his way of showing off. *Intolerance* may appear to be a three-hour lecture on peace, love and understanding from a man held largely responsible for the second coming of the Ku Klux Klan. What it is in fact is a very sophisticated blockbuster: love, sex, violence, heroism, drama, humour and spectacle beyond belief. On many criteria of quality, *Intolerance* may never have been bettered. Certainly in 1916, this was moviemaking par excellence: the virtuoso photography; the audacious intercutting of four different stories; the painstaking historical accuracy; the splendour of the set design and construction; those winning performances from Constance Talmadge and Mae Marsh; the acerbic intertitles courtesy of Anita Loos. These strands make for a rich film in which Griffith is



The big picture: the fall of Babylon, as depicted in D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance*

photographing a particularly complex thought. "Events are not set forth in their historical sequence or according to the accepted forms of dramatic construction," ran the film's foreword, "but as they might flash across a mind seeking to parallel the life of the different ages."

There are simpler pleasures here too: this film is indulgently designed with balletic crowd movements, it's dripping in gore (neck-biting, gouging and decapitations all occur on the field of battle), and don't forget the high-stakes race-against-time drama as Marsh attempts to save her husband (she comes perilously close to the train tracks) and the notorious orgy sequence.

But despite these enticements, *Intolerance* is not especially suited to modern tastes. Nor was it in tune with contemporary preferences. Griffith was forward-thinking in terms of his cinematic vision and his innate understanding of what the form could achieve, but retrogressive in his artistic leanings. Moreover, sentiment and his own prejudices clouded his judgement so often that the sermon he's trying to preach becomes incomprehensible. The complex four-in-one structure of this film baffled audiences, even critics, at the time. Now we're cool with that – but the idea of a cast list populated by characters such as 'The

What it is in fact is a very sophisticated blockbuster: love, sex, violence, heroism, drama and spectacle beyond belief

Little Dear One' and the linking device of Lillian Gish as 'The Eternal Mother' rocking a cradle is hard to swallow. Loving *Intolerance* is a struggle in any age. What makes *Intolerance* great, in fact, is what makes it a muddle. Everything on screen is immaculate, but the scope is too broad to absorb in a single sitting, and the intercutting is so finickety as to be impressionistic. This becomes a film you gaze at rather than watch, awed into stupefaction.

Because that first, smallish movie has been embroidered with so many gilt threads, Griffith and the audience lose sight of its forceful, pro-labour message. The suffering of Marsh and Robert Harron is dwarfed by the fall of Babylon, eclipsed by the crucifixion and outplayed by the massacre of the Huguenots. *The Birth of a Nation* stirred its audience; *Intolerance* batters it into passivity.

This is an impressive Blu-ray to add to your collection, capturing a stunning restoration of a film that is almost impossibly grand and beautiful. Watch it and rewatch it, and you can treasure its many gifts: the curl of Talmadge's fist, the seemingly endless vistas of Babylon, the musicality of the editing. You can even watch the 1919 re-edits of the modern and Babylonian stories in their entirety – far easier to digest. Essays in the accompanying booklet from Pauline Kael, Richard Porton and William M. Drew fight over the pros and cons of Griffith's radiant 'sun play', while Kevin Brownlow sums it up best in a short but essential documentary: "If you're interested in moving pictures you cannot possibly afford to miss it."

New releases

and a perverse modus operandi. Gruesome murder set pieces and outlandish villains would become quintessential *giallo* staples in coming years and, as if to announce the literary genre's arrival on the big screen, Nora is even shown reading a *giallo* paperback entitled *The Knife* in the film's opening scenes.

Although certainly pioneering, *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* is a low-key, modest film. It would be Bava's subsequent production, the violent, striking *Blood and Black Lace*, that would announce the genre's arrival in bold primary colours.

Disc: The film is presented in both its original Italian version and as *The Evil Eye*, the re-edited, rescored, more humorous US version prepared by American International Pictures.

JIGSAW

Val Guest; UK 1962; Renown Pictures/Region 2

DVD; 103 minutes; Certificate PG; 2.35:1

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

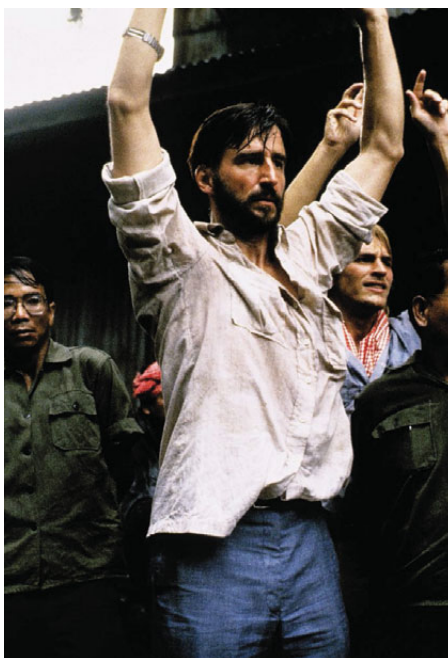
From scripting Will Hay comedies in the 30s through to a 1982 celluloid vehicle for TV double act Cannon and Ball, visiting most genres and passing fashions in between, Val Guest's career encapsulates much of the history of British cinema. The writer-director's peak, however, was probably the decade beginning with 1955's *The Quatermass Xperiment*, which included a string of modestly budgeted but creatively resourceful sci-fi offerings and crime flicks, among them the recently restored apocalyptic suspense *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*.

This South Coast *policier*, which emerged the following year, eschews chilling speculation in favour of a documentary approach to the minutiae of detection, as Jack Warner's veteran inspector and his eager nephew on the force try to solve the mystery behind a grisly discovery at a Saltdean rental property. There are the barest scraps of evidence to go on, but newfangled forensics and old-school intuition set the investigation on its way.

Casting easygoing, slightly stolid Warner in the lead gives this a very different tone from the bristling intensity Stanley Baker brought to Guest's 1959 cop movie *Hell Is a City*, and if dispensing with that sense of personal mission makes the drama less fiercely potent, it also has the beneficial side effect of putting the focus on the fascinatingly mundane settings and indeed the efficacy of the plotting. The dedicated procedural narrative, commonplace now but perhaps less so then, not only throws up some vintage British character business – from the prying caravan-site caretaker to the grocer concerned about a patrol car parked outside his shop – but also exposes a nation in the throes of social transformation, through a sad and seedy fresco of desperate single women and the opportunistic men preying on them.

If 60s Britain is a jigsaw, the bits don't fit together as well as they used to, not something to be said of the expertly structured storyline, which works up to a big reveal that, like all the best whodunnits, is at once unexpected and forehead-slappingly obvious.

Disc: Best ignore the back cover suggesting it's cropped to 4:3, since the soft but serviceable print is in letterboxed widescreen.



Shooting history: *The Killing Fields*

THE KILLING FIELDS

Roland Joffé; UK 1984; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray;

142 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.85:1; Features:

Joffé commentary, interviews with Joffé, David

Puttnam and Bruce Robinson, trailer

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

"Didacticism and cinema don't really mix, I think," says screenwriter Bruce Robinson in a typically candid interview shot for this 30th-anniversary edition, and it's easy to understand his misgivings: telescoping five years of Cambodia's agony into a mainstream commercial film running less than two-and-a-half hours was a tall enough order to begin with. So it's a great tribute to him, David Puttnam and Roland Joffé (a confirmed role model) than a Hollywood melodrama, even though it initially eases the viewer into a straightforwardly graspable Americans-abroad narrative revolving around *New York Times* journalist Sydney Schanberg (Sam Waterston). Schanberg's attempts to cover the 1975 Kissinger-backed bombing of Cambodia with the help of his trilingual assistant Dith Pran (Haing S. Ngor) are constantly frustrated both



Scene stealer: *Remember the Night*

by the lack of information on the ground and by the inefficiencies of 1970s communications technology in the face of deadlines set on the other side of the world in a different time zone.

But it's the film's final third that packs the real punch, when the foreigners are evacuated/deported and Pran is left behind to fend for himself under Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime as it attempts to process the entire Cambodian nation for either brainwashing or slaughter. Bar occasional snippets of first-person voiceover, this whole section is in untranslated Cambodian, which initially seems jarring since we're watching it through Pran's eyes, but it makes contextual sense because his country has become as alien to him as it must have seemed to his former colleagues. It's impossible to watch this section of the film today without thinking about what's happening across swathes of Syria and Iraq as they're blanketed by an equally uncompromising and murderous ideology, also unleashed partly thanks to an ill-judged US bombing campaign that was intended to have very different consequences.

When set against the power of these sequences, the occasional sentimental misjudgement can be forgiven – indeed, it's because the rest of the film is so commendably clear-eyed that so much attention was paid to the awkward interpolation of John Lennon's 'Imagine' in the first place.

Disc: Excellent transfer, and more substantial extras than a bald list implies: the interviews add up to nearly two hours, and the commentary is even longer.

FILMS BY MITCHELL LEISEN AND PRESTON STURGES

EASY LIVING

Mitchell Leisen; USA 1937; The Hollywood Studio Collection (Universal)/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 93 minutes; 1.33:1

REMEMBER THE NIGHT

Mitchell Leisen; USA 1939; The Hollywood Studio Collection (Universal)/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 90 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

Before becoming one of Hollywood's first writer-directors, Preston Sturges was one of its savviest writers (the first to secure a percentage of a film's gross). Two of his best scripts from this period were directed by Paramount comedy stalwart Mitchell Leisen, whose appreciation of Sturges's unique voice laid some valuable groundwork for Sturges's own firecracker career. Released on separate DVDs, *Easy Living* (1937) and *Remember the Night* (1939) should delight Sturges fans unfamiliar with these treats from the cusp of his heyday.

Easy Living is a shrewd, slightly shrill screwball comedy, in which working girl Mary Smith (a winning Jean Arthur) is catapulted to the high life when a fur coat lands on top of her, thrown from a Manhattan rooftop by J.P. Morgan-esque banker J.B. Ball (Edward Arnold). Mistaken for Ball's mistress, Mary loses her job, is housed in unspeakable luxury by crafty hotelier Mr Louis Louis, falls for Ball's wealth-scorning son (energetic Ray Milland) and inadvertently causes stock-market mayhem. Sturges would learn to move events faster and further, but this film unmistakably bears his hallmark, with pratfalls, zany names, escalating misunderstandings and

subversive verbal touches such as all-American magazine *The Boys' Constant Companion* being mistakenly called *The Boys' Constant Reminder*.

Remember the Night is an unpredictable romantic comedy of surprising dramatic adroitness and poignancy. When shoplifter Barbara Stanwyck's trial is adjourned, she ends up spending a cosy country Christmas with the loving family of prosecuting attorney Fred MacMurray (who made nine films with Leisen, and whose shifty amiability works well here). Romance buds but that courtroom awaits, and Sturges confidently sidesteps genre expectations, with love tempting the essentially honest lawyer towards wrongdoing, just as the criminal starts feeling that justice should be done. The leads are excellent in this warm-hearted prelude to 1944's *Double Indemnity*, and Sturges's knack of turning on a dime from loopy comedy (cow-milking antics and flaming wastebaskets) to straight-shooting sincerity affords *Remember the Night* an affecting human dimension. Just 13 months after its release, Sturges was soaring, having released three films as director and bagged the first Original Screenplay Oscar.

Disc: The quality is fine but, given the dialogue's fast-paced brilliance, subtitles are missed.

THE MAN WHO PLAYED GOD

John Adolfi; USA 1932; Warner Archives/
Region 1 DVD NTSC; 80 minutes; 1.37:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

What should we make of George Arliss, early-talkie Oscar-winner, a florid stage legend who became a box-office powerhouse in his sixties, and arguably the strangest, ghastliest, most thoroughly unmodern movie star of the sound era? Arliss specialised in playing historical figures, a gambit that best digested his personality and

style, but this swoony little melodrama is set in contemporary New York, and here he is a death's-skull anomaly, a near-elderly, sexually ambiguous scarecrow lost in his own dream movie. Declaring his lines in a raspy, dramatic tenor, Arliss almost scans like a special effect, complete with lipstick, the beady gaze of a paranoid grandmother and teeth so threatening that each attempt at a smile triggers a bite-phobic flight response – not to mention memories of *The Man Who Laughs* (1928). The strange thing about this film is how Arliss's uncanny affect grows effective as the story's crisis progresses – he's a celebrity concert pianist on a whirlwind tour who's deafened when an insurrectionist's bomb goes off during a performance for visiting royals.

The more stricken the character becomes – no longer blissful and studly, with multiple young women at his side, including a brand-new Bette Davis in her first year at Warner – the more Arliss resonates; his unique visage was built for suffering. The depressed pianist abandons life in general, but then finds meaning again when he starts spying on strangers on the street, reading their lips and solving their financial woes with swiftly written cheques – that is, until he glimpses fiancée Davis with another man and 'hears' their backstabbing plans.

A wholly studio-bound remake of Arliss's own silent version from 1922, and directed by Arliss's handpicked lackey John Adolfi, the movie is primarily a showcase for Arliss, whose epicene grandstanding remained hugely popular through the 30s, but it also offers a rare view of scrumptious stage star Violet Heming. Hedda Hopper, the director Oscar Apfel and Davis in her ascendant youth, when she was more saucy than confrontational.

Disc: Fine archival transfer.



Jigsaw This South Coast policier exposes a nation in the throes of transformation... If 60s Britain is a jigsaw, the pieces don't fit together as well as they used to

THE HAYAO MIYAZAKI COLLECTION

Hayao Miyazaki; Japan 1979-2013; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 1319 minutes total; Features: bonus disc featuring press conference when Miyazaki announces retirement, essay booklet

Reviewed by Nick Bradshaw

One of the benefits of founding your own studio, if you're about to embark on a three-decade, ten-film tear and elevate the art of animation, is that it makes it simple for video-disc publishers to gather your combined features in a handsome colour-coded box-set. Chasing down Miyazaki Hayao's pre-Studio Ghibli output in English-friendly formats remains a grubby business, but the Ghibli films here gathered (including the proto-Ghibli *Nausicaä Valley of the Wind*, plus Miyazaki's 1979 feature debut *The Castle of Cagliostro*, long part of the studio's rights portfolio) are a staple of StudioCanal UK's home-video trade; only the Oscar-winning *Spirited Away* (2002), still the top-grossing Japanese movie ever, is new to English-language Blu-ray. Suffice to say that: 1) these movies (beyond, perhaps, the dry run of *Cagliostro*) are bounteous, masterly, universal, essential; 2) they look much crisper, richer and purer on Blu-ray; 3) they're distinctly cheaper to collect in individual editions than in this limited-release set, list price £180.

Discs: Do the set's merits boil down to questions of home furnishing? Not entirely. As well as the box-cover image of a worn, fag-puffing pig – apparently a Miyazaki self-portrait – it also offers a bonus disc and an accompanying essay booklet to lure collectors and scholars. The former contains but one item: not Miyazaki's shorts, not the recent Ghibli doc *The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness*, but a complete 90-minute recording of the September 2013 press conference at which the 72-year-old director announced his retirement from feature direction. It's an extensive, minimalist video document, and as eccentric as anyone familiar with the international movie press should expect, but it offers flashes of character and insight when Miyazaki chooses to open up, be it on his reasons for retirement or if he likes France as much as Italy. The other discs are mostly extras-free, high-bitrate presentations of the features.

As for the booklet: for £180 you'd expect the intervention of a sub-editor, but David Jenkins's film notes notch up useful insights, while Tomohiro Machiyama's career appreciation brilliantly essays the dialectic of ecologism and humanism in Miyazaki's oeuvre. The three short texts by the master himself are mere morsels from his two scrapbook volumes of working memoirs, *Starting Point* and *Turning Point*.

THE NAKED CITY

Jules Dassin; USA 1948; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 96 minutes; 1.37:1;

Features: commentary by screenwriter Malvin Wald, 'New York and the Naked City' (history of NYC on film by Amy Taubin), 'Jules Dassin at LACMA' video interview, 'The Hollywood Ten' 1950 documentary short, stills gallery by Weegee, theatrical trailer, essay booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"Begins in a plane over the city, and ends in the gutter," said *Cue* magazine on the release of Jules Dassin's game-changing neorealist



Television

NICE WORK

UK 1989; BBC/Simply Media/Region 2

DVD; Certificate 15; 218 minutes; 4:3

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

The truism is that stories about the future really tell us about the times they were written in. The converse sometimes holds true: stories about the past can tell us about the future, though we don't necessarily know what they're telling us until the future arrives. David Lodge's adaptation of his own novel was broadcast by the BBC in 1989, a year after the book was published, and set in the very immediate past of 1986 – midway through the Thatcher years, though her name is never mentioned – a time of cuts, deindustrialisation and culture wars; but it uses a frame of reference that is deliberately, ironically Victorian.

The setting is Rummidge, Lodge's fictional stand-in for Birmingham. The heroine, Robyn Penrose (Haydn Gwynne), is an academic, a feminist, a dedicated follower of the latest critical fashions – semiotics, deconstruction – and author, in so far as a book can be said to have such a thing, of *The Industrious Muse*, a study of the 19th-century industrial novel (think *Hard Times*, *North and South*). As part of a scheme to promote partnerships between industry and academia, she ends up shadowing the hero, Vic Wilcox (Warren Clarke), managing director of a local engineering firm, self-made, masculine and sentimental (his favourite song is Jennifer Rush's 'The Power of Love'). He imagines he's going to be meeting some wimpy, otherworldly academic; she imagines a Gradgrind; both find their expectations fulfilled just as much as they are confounded. This is in essence an old-fashioned culture-clash comedy, but with enough twists to give the viewer a satisfying sense of cleverness – one reason why this disc is worth watching is that it is difficult to tease out all the ironies on a first viewing.

After Clarke's death in November, it was odd to notice how few obituaries even mentioned *Nice Work*, though it was the performance that shifted him up the ladder from reliable support to leading-man material. As Robyn shows Vic the possibilities of communication, subtext and sex, Clarke shows how he is softened and opened up, and how painful that liberation is. Gwynne, while plausible and stylish, is less nuanced – the fault lies partly in the writing. Christopher Menaul's direction stands up better than I'd remembered, in particular the fantasy sequences in which Vic sees himself as Actaeon to Robyn's Diana.

The surprise is how undated it feels. Aside from the almost complete absence of mobile phones (Vic's car phone is – younger viewers may need to have this explained – a significant status symbol), the hairstyles and the prevalence of cigarettes, its concerns are so contemporary: the decline of manufacturing, the commercialisation of academia, the disappearance of secure employment, the swelling importance of the City (Lodge's book was written two years after the 'Big Bang' of deregulation), sexism in the workplace; even the critical jargon hasn't moved on much.

Disc: The perfectly OK transfer unfortunately preserves some rather lurid colour schemes. There are no extras.



Out of This World It was British television's first science-fiction anthology series... All episodes but one have been wiped. 'Little Lost Robot' is the lone survivor

OUT OF THIS WORLD – LITTLE LOST ROBOT

UK 1962; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 52 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: VidFIRE version of 'Little Lost Robot'; audio commentary by producer Leonard White and TV sci-fi historian Mark Ward, audio-only recordings of two other episodes, PDF of script for 'Dumb Martian'; illustrated booklet with essays

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Out of This World, made by ABC for ITV, was British television's first science-fiction anthology series, the direct ancestor of the BBC's *Out of the Unknown* (reviewed *S&S* November 2014) – Irene Shubik was the creative force behind both, in each case relying on adaptations of published stories, by Clifford D. Simak, Philip K. Dick and Raymond F. Jones, among others.

Out of This World was, apparently, popular and well reviewed; whether it was actually any good is impossible to know, all episodes but one having been wiped. 'Little Lost Robot' is the lone survivor – one of Isaac Asimov's early stories featuring robopsychologist Susan Calvin (Maxine Audley) and Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics. Aboard a space station, a robot whose brain has been modified (so that, for efficiency's sake, it is marginally less concerned with preserving human life) has disappeared, and concealed itself among a number of outwardly identical robots. Calvin is flown from Earth to identify the maverick, along the way raising doubts about how long humans

can preserve their superior status when their mechanical servants are cleverer and stronger.

Audley has an engaging sternness, but some of the other acting is wooden, the script by Leo Lehman is fusty and at times terribly British (so many apologies!), and the robots themselves are unconvincing sub-*Who* contraptions: none of your uncanny valley nonsense. It's historically fascinating but dramatically requires more suspension of disbelief than I can manage. As the series host, Boris Karloff, ageing and fleshy, lends an antiquated air to the proceedings; the future has rarely seemed quite so far behind us.

Disc: This is, surely, the definitive presentation of the series, containing every scrap of available material, including two versions of the surviving episode (the main presentation is scanned from a 35mm negative; the VidFIRE version smooths it out to get something closer to the authentic 1962 home-viewing experience – the difference is not vast). You also get the script for John Wyndham's sub-Conradian 'Dumb Martian', which in the event was broadcast as part of the parent series *Armchair Theatre*, and audio recordings of two other episodes: Tom Godwin's much anthologised 'Cold Equations', essentially *The Moral Maze* in deep space; and 'Impostor', one of Philip K. Dick's dry runs for *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, about an exploding android outwardly indistinguishable from a human, adapted by Terry Nation. Despite uneven sound quality, this last is the best drama on the disc. **D**

New releases

policiér. It wasn't the first sound feature film shot on the streets of New York – FBI puff-piece *The House on 92nd Street* got there first – but its wide-ranging documentary style, incorporation of real street life and legwork-heavy police-procedural plot mark it as “a bit different from most films you've ever seen”, as producer Mark Hellinger's opening narration assures us.

As the comprehensive extras outline, many influences produced the film's distinct look and outlook: *Rome, Open City*, Weegee's pulp *vérité* (which also provided the title, and the stills photographer), screenwriter Malvin Wald's dense research with the NYPD, even the ‘newsreel technique’ of novelist John Dos Passos. It's not without its Hollywood touches – DP William Daniels, who had worked on von Stroheim's inflexible sets, lit these real interiors with techniques honed on *Foolish Wives*. And while the police tale is workaday, Barry Fitzgerald's Dan Muldoon, replete with avuncular cunning and whisper-soft comic touches, nonetheless catches the eye. What's perennially arresting, though, is the “cinematic image hovering ambiguously between fiction and fact”, as Alastair Philips's essay notes.

One wonders what was lost from Dassin's original, more politicised version, emphasising the gulf between New York's rich and poor. The studio, spooked by his and screenwriter Albert Maltz's radical politics and the film's unfamiliar look, released a heavily edited version after Hellinger's untimely death in December 1947. Wald observes drily that only Hellinger's estate insisting on the release (he had financed it independently) prevented the burning of the whole film.

Disc: The transfer is nicely textured, though there are some faint scratches in the police precinct scenes. Extras include Wald's detail-laced commentary and Amy Taubin's jaunty personal history of New York on film.

THE PROTAGONISTS

Luca Guadagnino; UK/Italy 1999; Argento/
Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 87 minutes; 1.85:1
anamorphic; Features: photo gallery, trailers

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

You certainly can't accuse *I Am Love* director Luca Guadagnino of playing safe with his feature debut. In fusing a documentary reconstruction of a real-life crime (a brutal and motiveless murder by two British teenagers in 1994) with a postmodern deconstruction of the purpose and legitimacy of such things, it has ambition to burn, and achieves plenty of striking effects on a clearly minuscule budget. Indeed, the filmmakers (who frequently appear on screen, as does their boom mike) make no attempt to hide their limited resources, restaging courtroom scenes in a back garden (Pasolini's muse Laura Betti appears as an English judge) and constantly pulling the camera back or switching the lights on to reveal how the latest bit of fakery has been achieved. *Crimewatch* it ain't, and nor does it bear much resemblance to the various dramatisations of the not dissimilar Leopold and Loeb case (*Rope, Compulsion, Swoon*).

But what is it instead? Tilda Swinton's otherworldly presence (frequently as an onscreen narrator) and several segues into near-abstraction



Spooky: Spione

place it firmly in art-movie territory, chiming somewhat uneasily with the interviews with the actual victim's family and with the detectives, journalists and forensic pathologists who investigated the crime. These sit equally awkwardly with the amateurish attempts at restaging the murder in fantasy sequences in which the killers wear self-psychologising T-shirts branded TROUBLED SOUL and PIECE OF SHIT. But is this all-too-evident hesitancy (to which Swinton explicitly owns up on more than one occasion) part of the film's core point about the impossibility of packaging messily multifaceted reality into pat little narratives? Indeed, who are the protagonists here? The killers (who remain shadowy and unnamed, the latter ostensibly for legal reasons) or the filmmakers – themselves only in their twenties and harbouring similar if admittedly less murderous delusions of grandeur?

For all the film's frequently maddening stylistic and conceptual tics, it's strangely refreshing to see an English-language crime film that's prepared to confront the consequences of what it's attempting, instead of simply revelling in the visceral would-be thrills served up by the glut of British gangster movies released the same year.

Disc: A decent transfer marred by an occasional light streak on the extreme right-hand side (older screens will crop this, many newer ones won't). Italian and English soundtracks are offered.

SIDEWALK STORIES

Charles Lane; USA 1989; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray; 101 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary, interview with Lane and composer Marc Marder, 'A Place in Time', trailer

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

If Charles Lane is known at all in the UK, it's for the deeply weird comedy *True Identity* (1991), which starred Lenny Henry as a New Yorker who had to ‘white up’, with the aid of elaborate prosthetics, in order to avoid the mafia's clutches. *True Identity* tanked, and Lane's feature career (to date, at least) went with it. Yet it was his 1989 debut, the black-and-white silent comedy *Sidewalk Stories* – only now receiving its first proper home-video release – that should have made him a household name.

Sidewalk Stories stars Lane as a homeless Greenwich Village street artist who winds up looking after a toddler following the murder of her father. Clearly inspired by Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* and J. Lee Thompson's *Tiger Bay*, the film proceeds with a clean, fast-paced narrative, making excellent use of its diminutive

star's gift for physical comedy while also commenting sharply on the plight of New York's multitudinous homeless population. Of special note is Marc Marder's astonishingly flexible score, which provides much of the emotional shading.

This handsomely furnished disc also includes Lane's 1977 silent short *A Place in Time*, in which his street artist character first appeared. Though Lane's comic skills are evident, it's a mostly bleak affair, based partly on the infamous 1964 case of Kitty Genovese, whose murder reportedly went ignored by onlookers. The film's vision of New York as crawling with rapists and muggers is positively apocalyptic, while the erratic pacing and tonal lurches between humour and brutal violence make for hallucinatory viewing.

Disc: A crisp transfer of a recent restoration.

SPIONE

Fritz Lang; Germany 1928; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/
Region B/2 Blu-ray/DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG;
145 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: choice of scores by Donald
Sosin and Neil Brand (Blu-ray only), 'Spies – A Small Film
But with a Lot of Action' documentary, essay booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Necessity was the mother of cinematic invention for Fritz Lang's paranoid whistlestop spy thriller, once talked down by Kracauer and Arnheim for its “empty sensations” and rapt tech-fetish. A UFA-enforced modest budget resulted in a sleek, modernist look after the “cinematographic cathedrals” (as Murielle Joudet's sharp-eyed essay terms them) *Die Nibelungen* and *Metropolis*. Obsessed with surveillance and control, as Jonathan Rosenbaum's authoritative overview notes, the frantic but amorphous plot filling the film's tight grid of close-ups, staircases and desk-dominated offices is driven by villain Haghi's communications network, which bristles with micro-cameras and listening devices.

If this seems astonishingly modern (*Spione*'s gadgets, ruses and speeding suspense sequences are always hailed as the prototype for the espionage genre), the film's use of disruptive visuals feels bracingly avant-garde. A poignant pre-suicide fantasy, a decadent blackmail cutaway and haunting numbers slithering across a train couchette all slide into the kinetic action that Lang imposed, creating an “abstract realism” (Joudet again). But a fat streak of sensual sentimentality, long disparaged as the melodramatic contribution of Thea von Harbou, Lang's screenwriter wife, saves the need-for-speed narrative from frenetic detachment. In the doomed dalliance of a diplomat (Lupu Pick, touchingly stoical), contrasted with the love-sanctioned deceptions of Gerda Maurus and Willy Fritsch's rival spies, there's human hurt that warms the chilly machinations of a chaotic world.

Disc: The Blu-ray transfer provides outstanding image quality, giving a shimmering texture to Maurus's beaded flapper gowns. It's pin-sharp for much of the time (spot the *Metropolis* posters on Lang's mean streets), and its two-for-one soundtracks are both excellent fits. The standout extra is a new German documentary, an all-you-can-eat *Spione* background buffet, with fascinating shot comparisons illustrating how the restoration was pieced together from often significantly different versions. **B**

Lost and found

WICKED WOMAN

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

A mesmerising Beverly Michaels makes Russell Rouse's tale of despair and desire much more than just another B-movie noir

By Kim Morgan

There's something especially mesmerising about watching Beverly Michaels slump her tired, nearly six-foot tall body through a tiny, dingy room. And not just any room: her depressing end-of-the-line boarding house is run by a woman who calls the joint "respectable" (which means it most certainly is not). This is the walk of a woman who has spent her entire day pounding the pavement, clad entirely in white, making sure that white stays clean, which isn't easy, making sure her tight clothing doesn't reveal too much (but maybe just enough), making sure she won't wobble on those heels and trip up her icy cool. Her beauty is her success in life. It will get her somewhere – anywhere – it doesn't have to be too far. Even a job would be nice. As Ingrid Bergman remarked about being born beautiful: "Aren't I lucky?" Well, yes, but when you have little else to go on, your luck can run out.

As Billie, in Russell Rouse's 1953 film *Wicked Woman*, Michaels is so perfectly cast it's unimaginable to think of any other actress in the part. Men gape as she slinks along the street. She's an extraordinary creation. But when she walks into that room, that sexy, hypnotic gait turns into the angry walk of a woman so sick and tired of life's day-to-day indignities that you feel as if you're spying on her. Tossing her handbag on the bed in disgust, chucking off her shoes, tying on her robe, skulking to her fridge to crack open a beer, she's almost as foot-heavy as Bette Davis in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, sliding across the floor in dirty slippers while bitterly delivering Joan Crawford her lunch. She's not quite Bette yet – she's too young and lovely – but she can see that woman in her future. And though she can finally relax in her small sanctuary after a day of slinking, she's never settled – she's mad at the world. She's mad at men, particularly her neighbouring creep (Percy Helton). And great actress that Michaels is, she makes you see it all in her body. She doesn't even need to say it: "What kind of goddamn life is this?"

Under the direction of Rouse, who was notable for writing challenging, seminal pictures with Clarence Greene, including *D.O.A.* (1950) and *The Well* (1951), and directing, among other pictures, the intriguing, experimental, dialogue-empty *The Thief* (1952) and the excellent *New York Confidential* (1955), the rarely seen *Wicked Woman* (also co-written with Greene) plays more like kitchen-sink pulp than pure noir – an appellation that's constantly debatable. Rouse, an inventive filmmaker, dived right into this world with an almost documentary eye and kept it squarely on



Beverly Michaels as Billie

As Billie, Michaels is so perfectly cast it's unimaginable to think of any other actress in the part... She's an extraordinary creation

his characters, trusting his actors to move around their surroundings with the familiarity of all losers: beds are where you throw your clothes, bar counters are where you lay your drunken head when you can't hold it up any longer, and cars are for domestic squabbles. Not surprisingly, Rouse married Michaels after making this picture.

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'Clarence Greene and Russell Rouse usually achieve some sort of originality in their films, but this squalid production belongs unmistakably to the great anonymous horde of 'B' pictures. Although it is technically quite efficient, the characters (who are identified by means of telling idiosyncracies) have no more depth than cardboard cut-outs. Beverly Michaels is suitably provoking, and Richard Egan plays with stolid conviction. But Billie, one feels, was not so much wicked as misguided' 'Monthly Film Bulletin', July 1955

The story is both simple and absurdly complex: when Billie finally does land a job at a bar, she naturally falls in love with the handsome bartender (Richard Egan). But there's a problem: he's married. And, worse, he's married to the woman who owns the bar – the blowzy though sympathetic drunk who hired her (Evelyn Scott). As frequently happens in *film noir*, love walks in at the worst possible moment. How do they escape? What are they going to do? In a rare case (and a gender switch on *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, which this movie resembles), it's the wife who needs to be removed. Will they rub her out? No. That's too typically *noir*. How about devising something crooked where it looks as if the dipsomaniac wife signed some papers, lost her business and the two lovers run off to Acapulco? There's a plan! It's devious, but not as wicked as the title suggests. And neither is desperate Billie. But alas, fate steps in via the angry emasculated reject: Percy Helton. When Percy Helton louses up your entire life, your world is truly two-bit. And then, like love, a colossal misunderstanding walks in at the worst possible moment and the deal is off. Love is over. Life starts all over again. Drifting.

Billie as drifter is, again, in gender reversal, more like Tom Neal in *Detour* or John Garfield in *Postman* – tangling with the wrong jerk or dropping into the wrong town. As a woman, she faces greater challenges than a man would – she is pawed at, possibly raped, or, to reference another female drifter, *Detour*'s Vera, in danger of being accidentally killed by a telephone cord in a hotel room. You never know what can happen on the open road.

I dislike using the word 'realistic' but there's no other way to describe what distinguishes *Wicked Woman* from other tawdry B-movies punched up with melodrama. Nothing wrong with melodrama, I love it, but there's no such thing here. The cast feel so lived-in and real they're almost freakish. Michaels isn't just leggy, she's six feet tall; Helton isn't just a worm, he's a bona fide hunchback; and Egan is so obnoxiously handsome he's managed to grow a dimple between his eyes. And with that, you find yourself liking and feeling for everyone in this picture – even pervy Percy. They're not very smart.

As *femmes fatales* go, Billie's not as intelligent as Martha Ivers, nor as evil as Kathie Moffat, nor as murderously duplicitous as Phyllis Dietrichson, she's just stupidly in love and trying, desperately, to survive in a man's world. The aforementioned women were too, but they possessed more conniving brass. Poor Billie actually allows love to louse up the works.

In that way, the ending is more dispiriting than any sexy *Gun Crazy* blast of *amour fou*. Egan is stuck with an enraged wife and Billie is back on the bus. Another town, another man, another lonely life. But when will it all run out? Keep those white clothes clean and don't wobble on those heels, wicked woman. ☹

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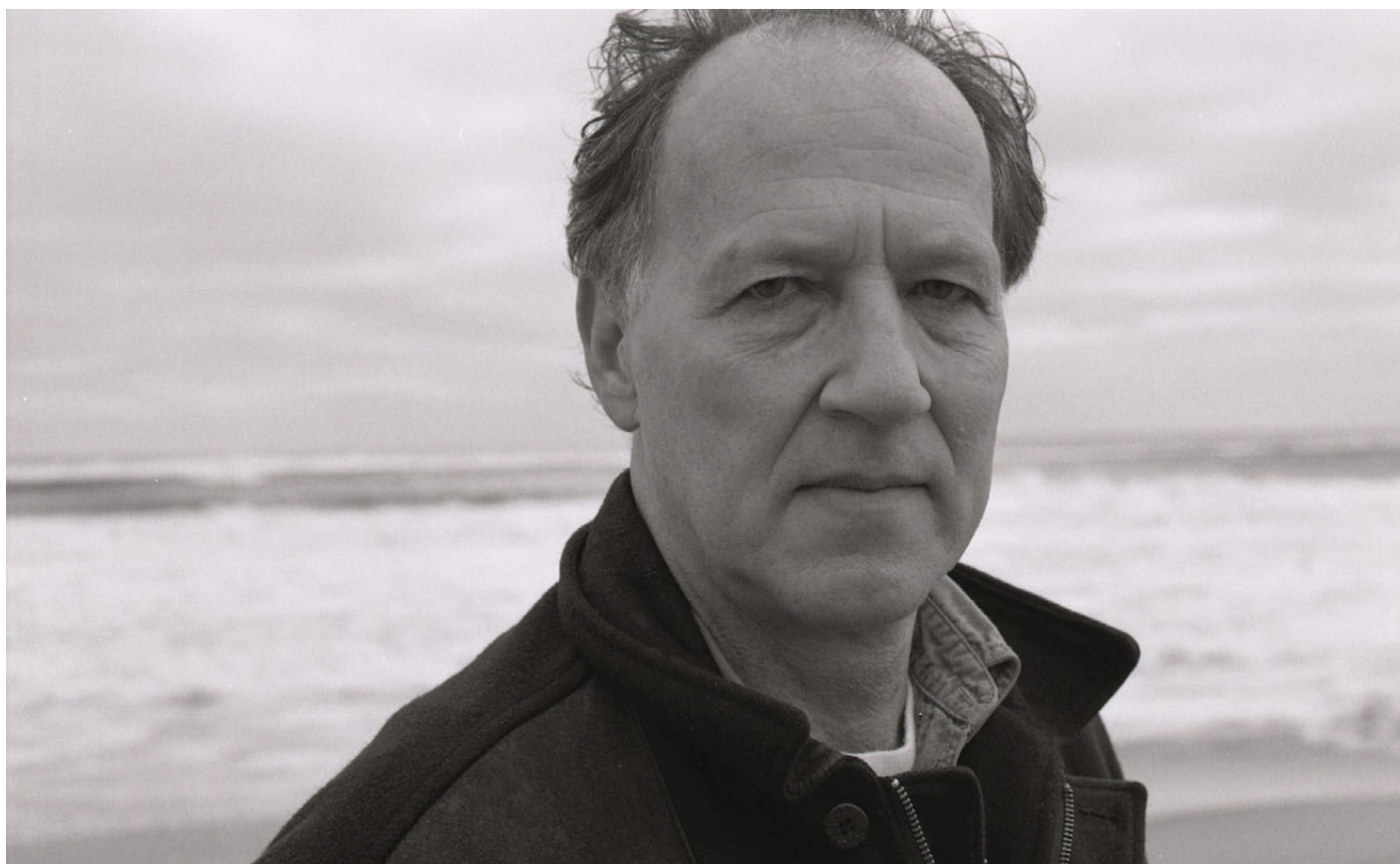
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Werner Herzog: 'A man should eat his shoes every once in a while'

'A CONQUISTADOR OF THE USELESS'

WERNER HERZOG

A Guide for the Perplexed

Edited by Paul Cronin, Faber & Faber, 592pp, £30, ISBN 9780571259779

Reviewed by Mark Cousins

The book-long interview is a great literary genre. Dennis O'Driscoll's one with Seamus Heaney – *Stepping Stones* (2009) – is a revelation. Faber & Faber's filmmakers on filmmakers series (of which *Werner Herzog: A Guide for the Perplexed* is an update, significantly expanding Paul Cronin's 2002 *Herzog on Herzog* book with conversations on each of the films the director has made since then, as well as discussions about his Rogue Film School, a new afterword by physicist Lawrence Krauss, ten poems written by Herzog that were originally published in June 1978, and more) is one of the best things published about cinema. Cronin's 436-page interview with Herzog – alongside 150 pages or so of accompanying texts – is so expansive, detailed and thought-provoking that it feels like more than a book. I can think of ten ways to use it.

First, as a home film school: sit on your

sofa, watch a Herzog film, *Fata Morgana* (1971) for example, which is currently on YouTube, then read how he made it. Herzog has made 60-odd films, including shorts, so it'll take you a couple of months, but it'll be worth it. His production stories are often wild, but he's very good at charting how ideas morph, how mishaps can be turned to your advantage, how ideas grow. He says that "we are surrounded by worn-out, banal, useless and exhausted images", which is what a filmmaker needs to know.

The book's second use is as a life manual. It has great advice on how to be a *mensch* in the road movie of life. Herzog doesn't take taxis in New York – they're extravagant – so he goes by subway. He says, "Walk on foot, learn languages and a craft or trade that has nothing to do with cinema. Filmmaking must have experience of life at its foundation," and "Switch off your internet connection and get to work." DP Peter Zeitlinger once said, "Werner never takes the paved road, always the dirt track," which is spot on, and relates to his hatred of posh restaurants: "It's misery for me being waited on. I'm literally close to panic. I'd rather sit on the sidewalk munching potato chips." Another cinematographer, Ed Lachman, says that if Herzog says he'll be at a

certain street corner at a certain time, on a day some years from now, he will be, all part of what Cronin calls "his never-ending *bildung* – self-improvement, personal transformation".

Its third use is as a piece in a cultural jigsaw. As you read, it's hard not to hear echoes of the mysticism of William Blake, the passion of Vincent van Gogh, the asceticism of St Thomas Aquinas, the suspicion of modernity in D.H. Lawrence. The book is a real help in thinking about the history of cultural ideas.

A fourth use is as a 'how not to'. Herzog is wrong about some things, and his wrongness helps us learn how to avoid making the same mistakes. He doesn't watch enough films, for example, and is suspicious of cinephiles. He thinks that film shouldn't be political, which, for me, weakens his Kuwaiti oil fields film *Lessons of Darkness* (1992). He thinks that men should be men's men, and knew John Waters for 40 years before he realised that he is gay, which is sweet in a way, but seems to suggest he assumes that all men are straight. More seriously, he fabricates scenes in his documentaries. He argues that this leads him to deeper truths, but the staged moments in his otherwise great film about a German-American Navy pilot who was

captured during the Vietnam War, *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1997), damage it somewhat.

The fifth use of the book is to make you laugh. Referring to a lost bet he had with Errol Morris that if he, Morris, ever succeeded in completing his film, Herzog would eat his shoe (an event later chronicled by Les Blank in 1980's *Werner Herzog Eats His Shoe*), he says, "A man should eat his shoes every once in a while. Errol next time suggested that I should eat my foot." There are other zingers: "I'm a conquistador of the useless." A film pitching session is "a grotesque gladiatorial contest run by thoroughly debased people". And one for the academics: "Whenever I encounter film theorists, I lower my head and charge."

The book's sixth use is as a warning against professional hubris. Herzog says that the very idea of an artist "doesn't seem right". People who call themselves artists exempt themselves from too many realities. He has no personal assistant or secretary, and thinks that being a filmmaker is less about business cards and reputation and more about how to pick locks and forge shooting permits.

The seventh use is in learning how to interview. Cronin is great at it. He has done

Herzog's adventures are so baroque that you can sit on that sofa and yet have encounters at the end of the world

his homework, picks up on themes, and asks short, pithy questions like this, referring to the aforementioned *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*: "Wasn't it a bit much to march Dieter back to the jungle with his hands bound behind his back?" Dieter Dengler had had a traumatic experience in Vietnam, and Herzog asked him to relive it.

The eighth use of the book is as a surrogate life. Herzog's adventures, driven by wanderlust and the search for distant landscapes and people, are so baroque that you can sit on that sofa and yet have encounters at the end of the world.

The ninth use of this book is as pure literature. Herzog rewrote his spoken answers to Cronin's questions (which is perhaps cheating), but the result is beautiful speaking-writing: "Rainer [Werner Fassbinder] was always a solid comrade in our battle to plough fields that hadn't yet been worked over." "The best description of hunger is the description of bread." "When I read Hölderlin, I have the sensation of the Hubble Telescope probing the depths of the universe."

The final, and most valuable, use of the book is as inspiration. Recently I had to do a 90-minute talk in Finland. I was worried it would be boring, and asked myself what Herzog would do in that circumstance. This gave me an idea. I'd cook a chicken on stage during the talk (Herzog hates chickens), then the audience and I would all eat it at the end.

Once you've used *Werner Herzog: A Guide for the Perplexed*, burn it on a beach at midnight and dance naked around the flames. Or, better still, eat it. That's what I did with my copy. ☺

QUATERMASS AND THE PIT

By Kim Newman, BFI/Palgrave, BFI Film Classics, 112pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781844577910

Reviewed by Vic Pratt

Nigel Kneale remains puzzlingly neglected considering the massive influence his writing continues to have on the sci-fi genre, with the only detailed account of his life and work being Andy Murray's 2006 biography *Into the Unknown*. So it's great to see a *Quatermass* film getting the BFI Film Classics treatment in this timely addition to the series by Kim Newman, adorned with a gorgeously evocative stained-glass-style cover by Nathanael Marsh. The third and final of Hammer's screen adaptations, *Quatermass and the Pit* might not perhaps be the one every aficionado would choose to do, but, as Newman explains early on, it provides a way in to the whole series on TV and film. Correspondingly this handy little book is split into two sections. The first deals with the series as a whole, the second explores *Pit* in scene-by-scene detail.

Pit was a somewhat belated addition to the series. *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955) and *Quatermass 2* (1957) were made just before Hammer became Britain's foremost specialist purveyor of grisly full-colour gothic chillers, and were shot in bleak black and white. A starkly splendid pair of films, they exude the anxious, edgy air of an uncertain, unrelentingly grey post-war Britain still struggling to get to grips with both the end of empire and the end-of-the-world threat of the atomic era. But by the time of the much-delayed *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967, though the TV serial had aired back in 1959) things weren't what they used to be. Hammer had principally become horror-makers, and London was – as the luridly coloured ladies' fashions on display in *Pit* remind us – swinging. The time-shift between conception and execution occasionally tells on the alien action played out down and around the Hobbs End Underground tunnels; while Kneale's interstellar locusts in their ship look like the reflected images in a kid's kaleidoscope, and

bleed copious amounts of green blood. Yet, eye-popping as they are, I can't help thinking full colour does *Quatermass* no favours, somehow adding a glossy layer of light-hearted artifice to proceedings that was previously avoided. So, for me at least, *Pit* is a provocative choice.

But it's all about the debate, of course, and wherever you choose to rank it within Kneale's canon – and for many, that would be right at the top – *Pit* (helmed by Roy Ward Baker, replacing Val Guest in the director's chair) remains a hugely influential and imaginative piece of work. As Newman makes clear, the film is abundant with some of the best ideas ever to feature in the saga, with the aforementioned five-million-year old arthropod aliens interwoven into a bewilderingly ambitious narrative encompassing ape men, mystic pentacles, strange old legends, ancient hauntings and video recorders that capture brainwaves. In fact, as Newman reveals, perfectionist Kneale, forever dissatisfied with his own efforts, decided that he'd failed adequately to compress his 207 minute TV serial into an hour and a half: there simply wasn't space to fit it all in. Surely Newman wrestled with a similar dilemma after doing the research for this volume – which explores the whole saga, its context, its influence, and provides us with a glimpse of Kneale the man to boot – as he attempted to boil it all down into 100-odd pages. There's a heck of a lot to cram in, and there remains a heck of a lot more to be written, but herein he makes sure all the main bases are expertly attended to.

Crowbarred in among various fascinating titbits of historical ephemera is the BBFC's dilly derogatory assessment of the film at the time: "This combines archaeology, science, black magic and space fiction and is even sillier than most of this type of story." Newman appends an enjoyably fierce footnote: "Doesn't the smug, superior tone make you want to go down to Soho Square and chuck stones through the BBFC's windows?" Indeed it does, and being reminded of such off-hand dismissals by the cinematic establishment of yesteryear only makes it all the more clear why succinct new re-examinations of historically scoffed-at but enduringly wonderful films like *Quatermass and the Pit* are so worthwhile today. ☺



Invasion earth: Roy Ward Baker's *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967)

TODD BROWNING'S DRACULA

Gary D. Rhodes, Tomahawk Press, 376pp, £20, ISBN 9780956683458

Reviewed by Kim Newman

A case can be made for Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) as the point when the horror genre came into being. When *Dracula* was put in to production, Universal touted it as an entry in a cycle of 'mysteries' based on plays including *The Cat and the Canary* and *The Bat*, both of which were remade as talkies. By the time it was released, it was the progenitor of a new type of film, and immediately led Universal to cement its position as market leader by slating *Frankenstein*, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mummy* and others. Despite this, and the lasting cult celebrity of star Bela Lugosi, the film has often been undervalued or dismissed by genre historians. Rhodes sets out to challenge an orthodoxy that he traces from William K. Everson and Carlos Clarens, among the first to take horror cinema seriously, through to David J. Skal, whose influential 2004 book *Hollywood Gothic* entertains the notion that Browning's *Dracula* is markedly inferior to the Spanish-language version shot by George Melford on the same sets.

The question of how individual viewers can be influenced by a critical consensus to see a film in a certain light is a fascinating one, and Rhodes is quite persuasive in noting the way unquestioned opinions have been passed down. He sets out by close analysis to refute often-repeated statements that Browning's *Dracula* is hampered by fidelity to earlier stage adaptations (showing how fully a third of the film covers plot that takes place before curtain-up on those) or that George Robinson, who photographed Melford's film, moves the camera more than Karl Freund, Browning's cinematographer. Indeed, Rhodes is so meticulous in his timings of shots and listing of edits and camera moves (comparing *Dracula* with 20 other 1930-31 movies to demonstrate that it is faster-paced than the norm for its day) that he risks getting bogged down in the impossible task of scientifically proving other critics are wrong. As it happens, my impression of *Dracula* is closer to Rhodes's than Skal's – but *Hollywood Gothic* is a more elegantly written book, so Rhodes wins the argument but perhaps not as definitively as he would like.

In examining the context for *Dracula* in America, going over pre-production, shooting, release and the legacy of the film, Rhodes unearths an enormous amount of fascinating material – including the turn-of-the-century vaudeville contortionist who billed himself as



Nightcrawler: Tod Browning's *Dracula*

'Dracula the Frolicsome Demon' – and manages to turn up relevant information that has lain unnoticed in archives for 80 years. Because of its importance, *Dracula* has been written about a lot, but Rhodes tackles everything afresh. The legend has had it that Browning was half-hearted about the project, but Rhodes shows that he (and Universal) pursued the rights for a decade. The currently available restoration of *Dracula* on Blu-ray, which so impressed Ramsey Campbell (who provides a foreword), is still slightly incomplete (missing a certain speech that was held over from the play) but shows the film in better shape than it has been in decades. With partisans like Rhodes, Browning's *Dracula* may well be vindicated yet. **S**

THE FILMS OF ERIC ROHMER

French New Wave to Old Master

Edited by Leah Anderst, Palgrave, 268pp, hardback, £60, ISBN 9781137010995.

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

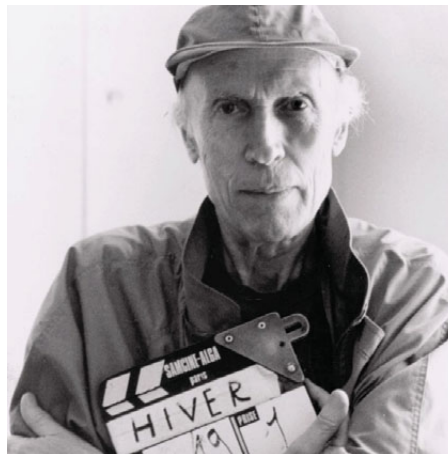
A handful of books dedicated to the work of Eric Rohmer exist, but his enormous *oeuvre*, consisting of some 50-odd films produced over five decades, is proportionately under-represented in critical writing. In her introduction to this collection of 17 essays on the man born Maurice Schérer, Leah Anderst acknowledges that his vast output represents something of a challenge to the scholar. Yet his contemporary and friend Jean-Luc Godard has directed more than double the number of films and the critical literature surrounding him could fill a library. Is there something within Rohmer's films, then, that makes that difficult to write about?

Perhaps the problem is to do with a certain stylistic and thematic homogeneity. Time and again, as Anderst puts it, Rohmer's bourgeois characters "talk and talk, analysing their motivations and their relationships, and, often, nothing much seems to happen". His collected works thus feel distinct *in toto* and yet strangely indistinguishable as individual parts, and the process of writing about them all too often becomes an exercise in repetition. Or else certain works take on a kind of metonymic value, so that *Ma nuit chez Maud* (1969) condenses into one film Rohmer's broader interests in morality and religion; *The Lady and the Duke* (2001) historiography and adaptation; *Claire's Knee* (1970) eroticism and libertinage; *The Green Ray* (1986) romance and literary heritage.

These four totem works all feature within Anderst's volume, which by dint of its format

relies on using key films to exemplify broader concerns, in ways less and more surprising. Sure enough, Matthew Thorpe's analysis of *Maud* focuses on the philosophical notion of 'moral imagination'; while Jerry W. Carlson discusses *The Lady and the Duke* in relation to the director's perennial concern with representation and historiography. Both pieces do an admirable job of fine-tuning existing arguments around their respective subjects, but they are less refreshing than Mary Harrod's novel twist on *The Green Ray*, which complicates auteurist readings of the film by situating it as part of the rom-com genre. Or indeed Derek Schilling's essay on bourgeois property and propriety in *Claire's Knee*, a film that "unfolds between two villas on the picturesque Lake Annoy" and whose heroine "exhibits a taste

Eric Rohmer's collected works feel distinct in toto and yet strangely indistinguishable as individual parts



Catholic tastes: Eric Rohmer

for clothing that readily identifies her status".

More pleasing still is an apparent commitment on the part of Anderst and her contributors to move beyond Rohmer's more famous features to take in his television films and documentaries, as well as his criticism, theory, politics and religious persuasions. In separate articles, for example, Ivone Margulies and Mark Cohen excavate the little-known pedagogical films Rohmer made for television during the 1960s, revealing them as prisms through which his later features can be viewed. Meanwhile Tom Gunning, T. Jefferson Kline and Anderst herself examine, in different ways, the continuities and divergences between Rohmer's early film criticism and his own praxis, tracing often surprising lines of flight between the films Rohmer loved and those he made. Most fascinating of all is Antoine de Baecque's use of materials recently made available from the filmmaker's extensive archives – letters, news and press clippings, interviews and published writings – to construct a rich and multifaceted narrative of Rohmer's political life, portraying him as a man who "watches history passing by, remaining conservative, in life as in ideology. And, mostly, his films matter more than anything else."

The book's catholic approach is appropriate to a filmmaker whose own religious persuasions shaped his work and responses to them, as Keith Tester discusses in his own contribution to the volume. Here, he characterises Rohmer's answer to the question of whether he was a practising Catholic ("Yes, but you must draw your own conclusions from that") as "elusive, even as it appeared to reveal everything". It's a perfect description of the filmmaker himself and, of course, of his films, which somehow escape our grasp right at the moment we seem closest to skewering them. Anderst's collection offers an elegant range of perspectives from which to view Rohmer's work. Nonetheless, one cannot help but feel that there is much still that remains tantalisingly out of reach. **S**

Read



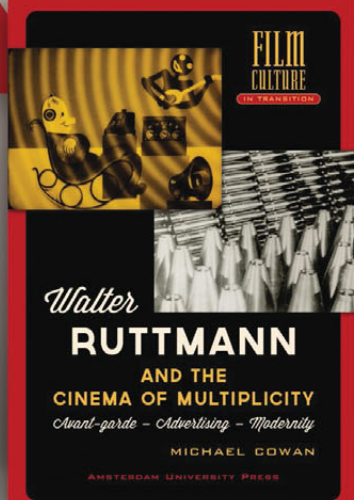
CREATING THE WITNESS

Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet

By Leshu Torchin, University of Minnesota Press ('Visible Evidence' series); 296pp; illustrated, paperback \$25.00, ISBN 9780816676231; hardback, \$75.00, ISBN 9780816676224

Asking the question, "How can visual media promote action?", *Creating the Witness* examines the role of film and other screen media in creating virtual witnesses to genocide over the past 100 years. The book surveys aesthetic strategies and social practices that have contributed to popular understandings of genocide and which have called upon viewers to act on behalf of human rights. "This magnificent, grounded, and rigorously researched book boldly probes a century of imaging genocides in Armenia, Germany, Rwanda, the Balkans, the Philippines, the United States, and Darfur across photography, documentary, popular culture narrative films, user-generated media and gaming." (Patricia R. Zimmermann)

<http://bit.ly/1BOFgj6>



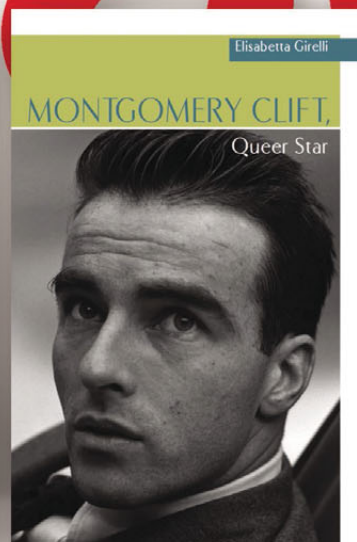
WALTER RUTTMANN AND THE CINEMA OF MULTIPLICITY

Avant Garde – Advertising – Modernity

By Michael Cowan, Amsterdam University Press, 260pp, hardback, €99, ISBN 9879089645852

By any account, Walter Ruttmann was a pioneer of experimental and documentary film. But like many of his contemporaries in the inter-war avant garde, Ruttmann was also heavily involved in advertising and promotion work, and he would go on to make propaganda films under National Socialism. The first study of Ruttmann in English, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity* examines this little-known aspect of Ruttmann's work, but it also offers much more. Winner of the 2014 Willy Haas Award for an important book on German cinema, Cowan's study is less a biography of Ruttmann than a reflection on the surprising imbrications between experimental film and industrial society in early 20th-century Germany.

<http://bit.ly/1vZqdAO>



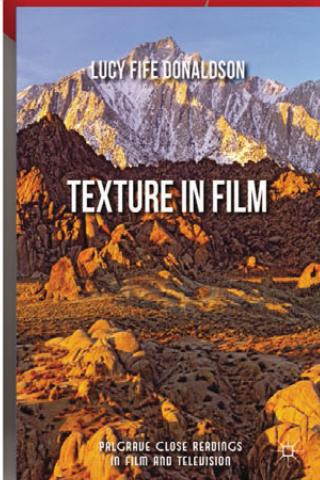
MONTGOMERY CLIFT

Queer Star

By Elisabetta Girelli, Wayne State University Press, 296pp, paperback, illustrated, \$31.95, ISBN 9780814339244

"The breadth of Girelli's theoretical knowledge and the care with which she marries queer theory with detailed analyses of Clift's filmography allow *Montgomery Clift: Queer Star* to be a productive addition to queer star studies. It is a testament to both her analytic intelligence and clear passion for her subject that it will be difficult for me to watch a Montgomery Clift performance and not think of the subtleties of erotic ambivalence and gender disruption that Girelli illuminates throughout her book." (Matthew Connolly, *The Velvet Light Trap*)

<http://bit.ly/1vJj8hX>



TEXTURE IN FILM

By Lucy Donaldson, Palgrave, ('Palgrave Close Readings in Film and Television' series; series editors: John Gibbs and Douglas Pye), 208pp, hardback (and e-book), illustrated, £55, ISBN 9781137034786

Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives in art, literature and music, Donaldson develops a stimulating understanding of a concept that has received little detailed attention in relation to film. Texture has an important sensory dimension: it expresses the feel of something and thus evokes a response. Texture also encompasses broader expressions of quality and nature, relating to the weaving of cloth, a web or a narrative. *Texture in Film* contributes to the increasing body of work aiming to renew attention on sensorial experience in the cinema, through an approach to details of filmmaking decisions and evaluations of style and meaning.

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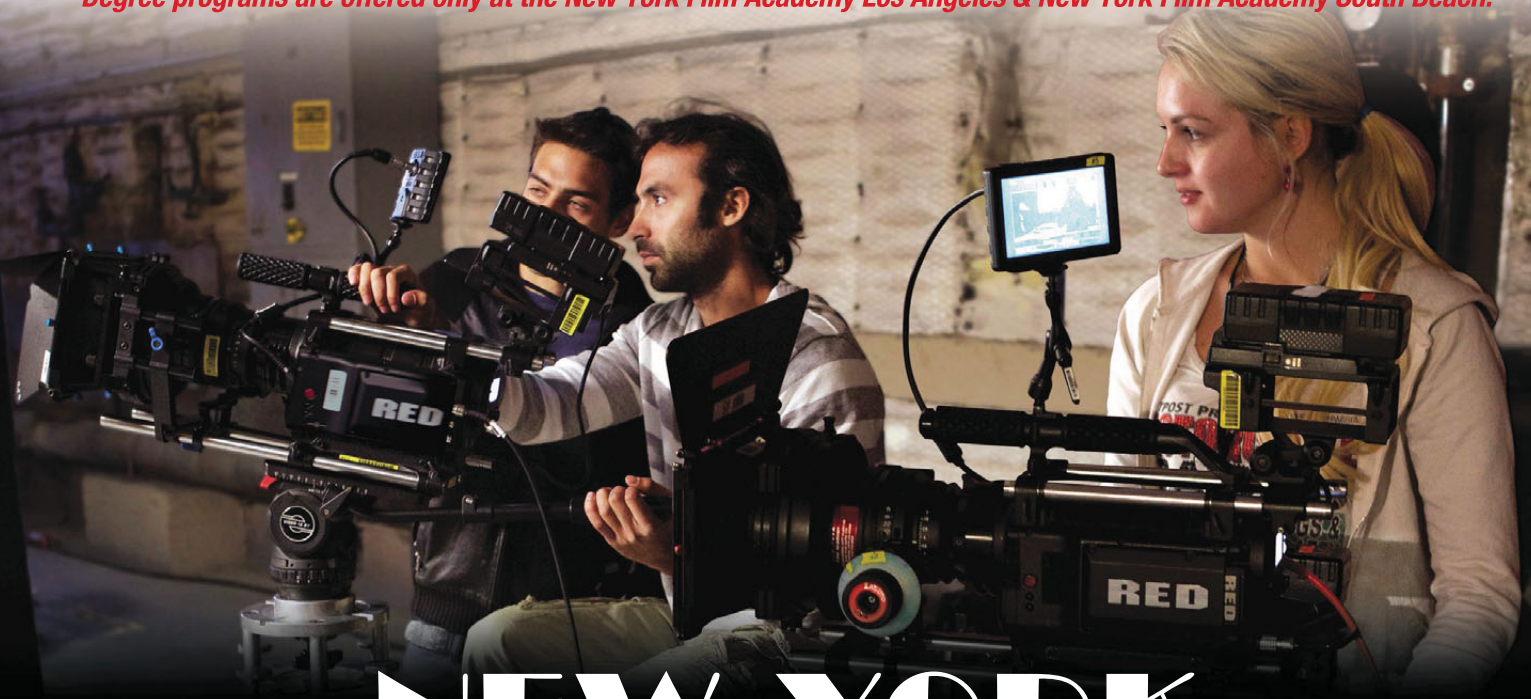
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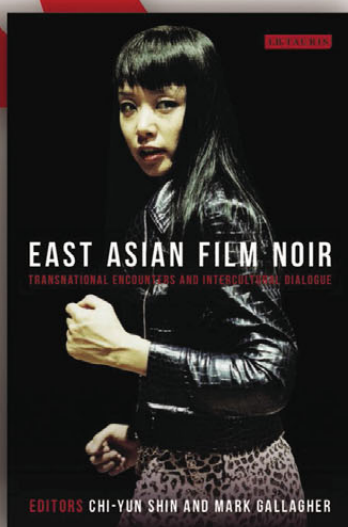


SILENT RUNNING

By Mark Kermode, BFI Publishing/
Palgrave, 88pp, paperback, illustrated,
£12.99, ISBN 978184578320

A visually stunning and heartfelt riposte to the emotional sterility of Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, Douglas Trumbull's eco-themed *Silent Running* (1972) became one of the defining science-fiction films of the 70s. Mark Kermode, writing on his favourite science-fiction film of all time, traces Trumbull's sentimental masterpiece from its roots in the counter-culture of the 60s to its enduring appeal as a cult classic in the 21st century. Drawing on a new interview with Trumbull, Kermode examines both the technical and thematic elements of this uniquely moving space adventure, which continues to be mirrored and imitated by filmmakers today.

<http://bit.ly/1uMrSof>

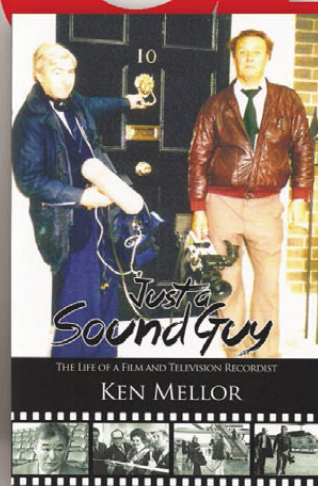


EAST ASIAN FILM NOIR

**Transnational Encounters and
Intercultural Dialogue**

Edited by Chi-Yun Shin & Mark Gallagher;
Tauris World Cinema series; 288pp;
hardback, £62.00, ISBN 9781780760087;
paperback, £15.99, ISBN 9781780760094
Film noir has been understood as a genre exclusive to Hollywood. But classical US *noir*'s downbeat sensibility also finds expression in later films from Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. This is the first book to explore those films and the filmmakers who made them. Looking at a range of examples from the 1950s to the present – including *The Crimson Kimono*, *Ghost in the Shell* and *Rebels of the Neon God* – this work conceptualises and articulates an internationally situated 'East Asian *film noir*'. In doing so, it raises fascinating questions around the politics of representation, authorial activity, genre, and local and cross-cultural reception.

www.ibtauris.com



JUST A SOUND GUY

**The Life of a Film and
Television Recordist**

By Ken Mellor, Vanguard Press, 242pp,
paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781843867869
Question: What do you call someone who has had tea with the Queen Mother, lunch with Morecambe and Wise and a clip round the ear from John Cleese? Answer: Just a Sound Guy. This is the title of Ken Mellor's autobiography of his 40-plus years as a sound recordist in film and television – from showbiz celebs to war-torn Vietnam. Through the changing years of production technology, from 35mm film to Umatic and Betacam video, it is a story of humour and hardship that is by turns heart-warming and harrowing. A family background in the cinema industry that dates back to the silent days ensured that his formative years were steeped in cinema lore. With more than 60 unpublished photos.

<http://bit.ly/11no6dp>



QUATERMASS AND THE PIT

By Kim Newman, BFI Publishing/
Palgrave, 112pp, paperback, illustrated,
£12.99, ISBN 9781844577910

Before 2001: *A Space Odyssey* and *Doctor Who*, *Quatermass and the Pit* was the paramount British science-fiction saga in film and television. Kim Newman's fascinating study focuses on Roy Ward Baker's 1967 film, written by *Quatermass* creator Nigel Kneale for Hammer Films, but also looks at the origins of the *Quatermass* franchise in 1950s BBC serials and earlier films. Exploring the production and reception of the film and series, Newman assesses the lasting importance of this landmark franchise. One of nine brand new BFI Film Classics offering fascinating explorations of key science-fiction films.

<http://bit.ly/1uMrSof>

READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

TURNING DOWN KUBRICK

Further to Christopher Frayling's cover story on 2001: A Space Odyssey ('Intelligent design', S&S, December 2014), Toshio Ban's 1992 manga biography Tezuka Osamu Monogatari claims that the creator of Astro Boy, the first anime show to run on US TV, was approached by Kubrick in January 1965 and offered a production design job on his upcoming science-fiction film. Tezuka refused, pleading his responsibilities to his new series Kimba the White Lion, although one suspects that he would also have been reluctant to work under someone else – the text does not specify if it was a lead designer post or something more lowly. However, Tezuka always seems to have derived a sense of distaff pride from the film's success, and there are arguably echoes of Astro Boy's Spartan future in sequences of Kubrick's spaceports and liners. Thereafter, Tezuka would often be found listening to the soundtrack while he worked in his studio.

Jonathan Clements Jyväskylä, Finland

KRISTL CLEAR

In December, S&S published a brief announcement in 'On Our Radar' of a Vlado Kristl retrospective at London's Tate Modern, referring to him as a "little-known German auteur".

The fact that one of the cult figures of Eastern European modernism is "little-known" is sad, but probably true. Something else is not true – Kristl was not a German, but a Croat, born in Zagreb in 1923. He was also one of the key authors of Yugoslavian modernism in the 50s.

A true nonconformist, Kristl joined Tito's partisans as a teenager; post-war he participated in agitprop activities as a painter. In the early 50s he was a co-founder and key member of the avant-garde group EXAT 51, which made a radical, and early, break with socialist realism and changed the entire direction of Yugoslavian art.

In the late 50s Kristl joined the Zagreb Film Studio and became one of three key early members of the Zagreb School of Animated Films. His films *The Skin of Sorrow* (1960) and *Don Quixote* (1961) are true classics. Following harsh criticism of his almost abstract *Don Quixote*, he left Yugoslavia and emigrated to Germany.

Unlike other key authors of the Zagreb school, who were communists, Kristl was a kind of dissident and never came back to Croatia. But his early Yugoslavian career both in painting and in animation does not deserve to be "little known".

Jurica Pavicic Split, Croatia

SPOILED ROTTEN

Is it my imagination, or are reviews that reveal a plot twist becoming more common in your pages? If so, please reconsider the policy, as I doubt I'm the only reader who finds it very frustrating.

Providing a warning of the spoiler is really no answer. All that achieves is to leave me with a choice of either reading the review anyway (and hence reducing my pleasure in the film when I later see it) or skipping the review altogether

LETTER OF THE MONTH BUT IS IT ART?



I feel as though I am drowning in the sea of, for me, unmerited praise generated by Mr. Turner ('A Dab Hand' and review, S&S, November 2014), but I'll focus on only one point – the disgraceful depiction of John Ruskin as a lipping upper-class idiot.

Ruskin, one of the great minds of the 19th century as both social critic and art

critic, was one of the bravest and earliest supporters of Turner's late work. To hear audiences tittering at the depiction of this fine man was virtually unbearable. Perhaps he is standing in for the critics who Leigh believes have been niggardly in their appreciation of his work.

Grahame Smith Stirling

(which may result in me missing a worthwhile film I would otherwise have been alerted to).

The plot twist involved is seldom, if ever, a crucial part of the review, and so could easily be left out. It would take only the most minimal effort for your writers to avoid including spoilers or, where one does slip through, for your sub-editors to cut it as the review is put to page.

Paul Slade London

BOX FRESH

It was a pleasant surprise to see you ask your contributors to include television among their highlights in your recent poll ('Films of the year', S&S, January), and great to see a wide range of interesting selections reflecting a variety of television across genre, form and platform. But the cursory, even dismissive, responses of a few critics suggest that some were taken aback by the question. That somewhat contradicts Nick James's assertion in his introduction that the "prejudices and snobberies between cinema and television drama are beginning to fall away", at least as far as some S&S contributors are concerned. However, the intention on the magazine's part is very welcome. I look forward to more television coverage in S&S in 2015.

Lisa Kerrigan TV curator, BFI National Archive

KNEE-JERK CRITICS

With regard to Michael Atkinson's review of *The Green Prince* (S&S, January), although the documentary's context is vital for its appreciation, this reader, for one, does not care to be on the receiving end of a lecture expounding the reviewer's personal opinions on the incredibly complex Israel-Palestine conflict. Atkinson

describes the documentary's focus on its two protagonists as "the deftest of propaganda feints", an "abnegation of political responsibility", and "something only an Israeli or occupation-sympathetic filmmaker would care to do", etc. Such personal opinions have no place in a serious review. It may come as a shock to Mr Atkinson to learn that not everyone in the West is a knee-jerk critic of Israel and its policies.

Karl White by email

UNJUSTIFIED CRITICISM

While I was glad to read your reviews of Nadav Schirman's *The Green Prince* and Leila Sansour's *Open Bethlehem* I couldn't help noticing that both had recourse to the word 'demonise'. In the first instance it sounds as though it was justified; but in the case of Hannah McGill's somewhat patronising review, it is clearly not appropriate to describe criticism of Israel for its settlement policy as 'demonising' when that policy is carried out in defiance of international law and with the disapproval of virtually all countries in the world. In the same way that pro-Zionists often describe criticism of Israel as 'anti-Semitic', 'demonising' also suggests an unjustified and irrational approach and helps to deflect any justified criticism of Israel for its failures to observe such international law.

Paul Hughes-Smith London

Additions and corrections

January p.73 *Dumb and Dumber To*, Certificate 15, 109m 24; p.81 *Manakamana*, Certificate U, 118m 39s; p.82 *Mea Culpa*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate: 15, Running time: 86m 53s; p.84 *Me, Myself and Mum*, Certificate 15, 86m 36s; p.85 *Merchants of Doubt*, Certificate 12A, 95m 57s; p.88 *Open Bethlehem*, Certificate PG, 89m 53s; p.89 *School of Babel*, Certificate PG, 93m 38s; p.90 *St Vincent*, Certificate 12A, 102m 17s

THE BREAKING POINT



Michael Curtiz's desolate closing image of an innocent paying the price for an uncaring economic system remains dismally topical

By Trevor Johnston

The second time Warner Bros brought Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* to the screen, the studio was a good deal more faithful to the source. The chemistry between Bogart and Bacall in Howard Hawks's rather loose 1944 version has gone down in celluloid legend, yet Michael Curtiz's subsequent, more authentic adaptation, 1950's *The Breaking Point*, is barely remembered, even though it's in many respects the more powerful film. Driven by a magnetic performance from John Garfield, it restores the protagonist's crisis of moral identity to centre-stage, as a former navy man finds himself in dubious waters when his dream of making a living from his fishing boat founders on the cruel financial realities of post-war America.

Indeed, while the central character actually has his roots in a Hemingway short story going back to 1934, the legacy of World War II hangs heavy in the background, the film essentially assessing whether America is indeed a land fit for heroes. Sundry highly regarded late 1940s Hollywood dramas (among them William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* and Edward Dmytryk's *Crossfire*) also focus on the travails of former combatants, but what's especially potent in this instance – not least in terms of the piercing final scene – is that the key questions of integrity and responsibility facing hard-pressed Garfield are seen to be no less relevant for society as a whole.

The Breaking Point remains comparatively

unheralded in part because (entirely unfounded) accusations of Garfield's communist affiliations surfaced during production and Warners then put little promotional effort behind it – the film even had to wait until 2011 for its first DVD release. It absolutely warrants wider exposure, however, since Garfield is in peak form as an essentially decent man whose proud refusal to acknowledge that his boat-hire venture is going nowhere leads him to take on legally dubious smuggling assignments, sully his ideals for the tainted cash that will support his wife and children. The pressure builds as he gets deeper into trouble, Garfield's performance never overdramatising the reactions of a man who doesn't show emotion easily. His torment is palpable, yet it's effectively internalised in a manner that highlights his significance as a forerunner of the Method school of screen acting, yet remains free of the self-serving affectation that sometimes came with that particular territory.

The screenplay by Randal MacDougall makes the household's money worries absolutely believable, adeptly using the figure of loyal wife Phyllis Thaxter as the crux for Garfield's defining choice between selfish pride and selfless responsibility. She wants him to forget the boat and work on her dad's thriving lettuce farm, but he prefers to hold on to his dream at any cost, even if it means jeopardising his law-abiding moral code, and putting his life in danger. Patricia Neal's slinky femme fatale ("Nice? There's no

The distant overhead shot that singles out this tiny, isolated individual prompts sober reflection rather than easy tears

future in it") makes straying from the path even more tempting, yet the most striking thing in the film is how it uses the character of the skipper's loyal helpmate, Wesley, to tally the bitter cost of Garfield's errant actions. Wesley is played by black Puerto Rican actor Juano Hernández – fresh from a key role in Clarence Brown's Southern racial drama *Intruder in the Dust* – yet, remarkably for the time, no reference is ever made to his colour. Given that the boat is his sole source of income too, he stands by Garfield's reluctant involvement in landing Chinese illegals on the southern California coast, yet his boss's subsequent decision to sell out to a criminal gang seeking a sea-going getaway has even more serious consequences – a fatal gunshot. The agony writ large on Garfield's face suggests deep sympathy for the loss of Hernandez's kind-hearted husband and father, and although the film manages to punish Garfield while still affording him the opportunity to change, it still has one more racially inflected killer blow in store. Back ashore, there's resolution ahead for all the characters but one: Hernandez's small son, standing alone at the dockyard, waiting for the parent who'll never return.

The prolific and versatile Curtiz, often regarded as a mere Hollywood journeyman, really pulls out the stops here. A sentimental close-up on the child's distress would have pushed the hot-button, but instead he hangs back. The distant overhead shot that singles out this tiny, isolated individual prompts sober reflection rather than easy tears. Garfield has realised to his cost that family responsibilities come first, but that those at bottom of the social ladder ultimately pay the price as America fails in its duty of care towards its most vulnerable citizens. More than 60 years on, it's an issue that remains worryingly relevant. **S**

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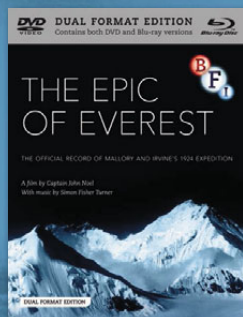
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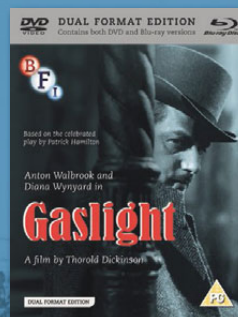
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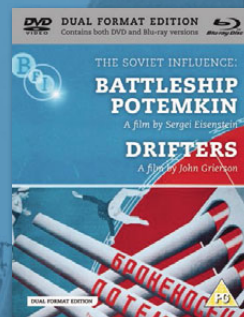
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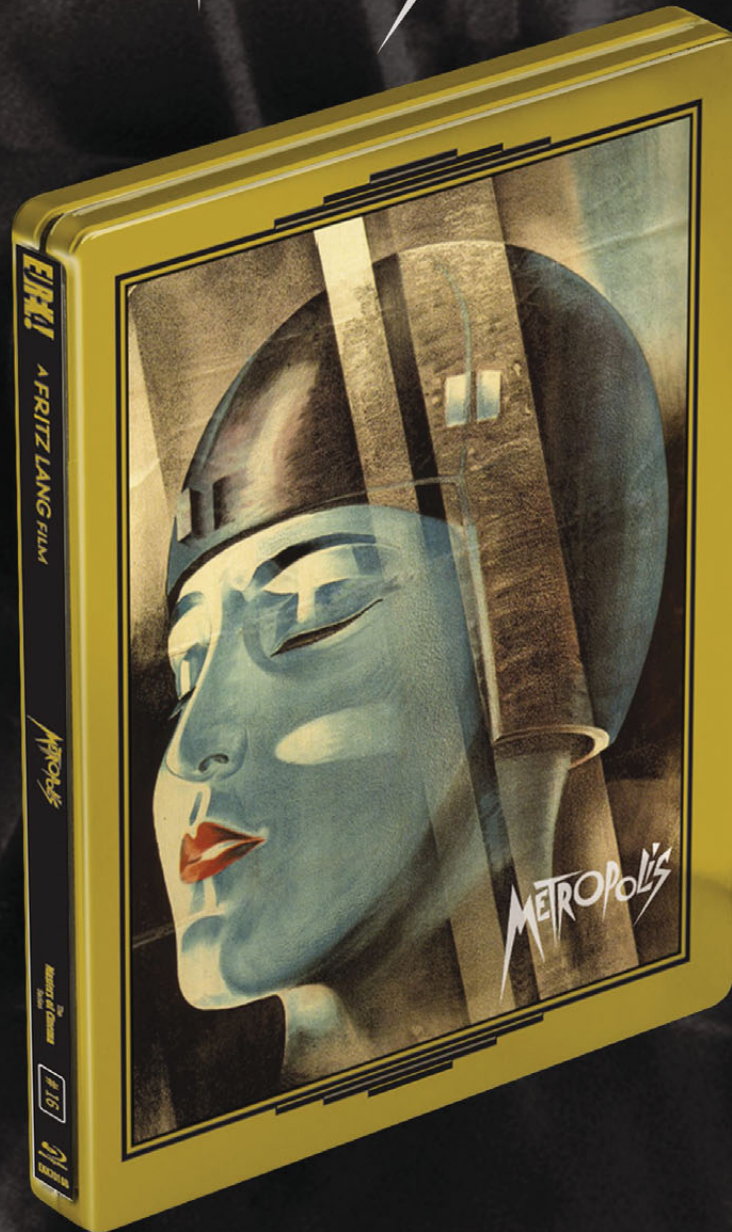
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